# Hans-Geoi

Cuestiones abiertas | Open Questions

COLECCIÓN FILOSÓFICA ACTUAL

Editorial Universitaria Universidad Central del Ecuador Filosófica Editorial

Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas Universidad Central del Ecuador

# **HANS-GEORG GADAMER**

Cuestiones abiertas / Open Questions

La filosofía ocupa un lugar insustituible a la hora de cuestionar los prejuicios y certezas impuestas por el sentido común, las creencias culturales y las costumbres. En lugar de ofrecer respuestas definitivas, expande horizontes y cultiva la duda crítica. Nos libera del dogmatismo y mantiene viva nuestra capacidad de asombro, al estar vinculada al mundo, a la vida, provocando sorpresa y enriqueciendo nuestras percepciones. Además, revela aspectos inadvertidos de lo cotidiano, profundizando nuestra comprensión más allá de lo evidente o asumido como incuestionable.

En un contexto generalizado de fragmentación, desinformación y agotamiento social, el pensamiento filosófico se convierte en un acto de resistencia creativa, permitiendo concebir posibilidades más allá de los límites definidos por las estructuras dominantes de la época.

La filosofía, lejos de ser un artefacto puramente intelectual, es una práctica indispensable y transformadora. La COLEC-CIÓN FILOSÓFICA ACTUAL surge como una apuesta crucial para impulsar la reflexión crítica desde Ecuador hacia América Latina y otras regiones del mundo. Esta colección busca consolidar un espacio de diálogo interdisciplinario, convirtiendo la filosofía en un recurso activo ante las crisis contemporáneas. Así, la filosofía asume su tarea esencial: liberarnos de certezas que limitan nuestra comprensión, permitiéndonos no solo habitar el presente con mayor lucidez, sino también imaginar y construir futuros posibles de forma reflexiva.

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Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas Universidad Central del Ecuador

Prof. Santiago M. Zarria Prof. Martín Aulestia Calero Prof. Pablo Meriguet Prof.a. Natasha Sandoval

La COLECCIÓN FILOSÓFICA ACTUAL es un proyecto desarrollado entre la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas de la Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE) y Filosófica, Fundación de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos y Culturales, que comenzó en 2022 a través de la firma de un convenio de cooperación académica entre ambas instituciones. Este esfuerzo reúne a reconocidos especialistas nacionales e internacionales en filosofía y ciencias sociales, promoviendo un diálogo entre diversas corrientes de pensamiento y fortaleciendo así la academia en Ecuador y la región.

Iniciativas como esta son esenciales para la difusión y el desarrollo del pensamiento filosófico, ya que contribuyen a formar ciudadanos críticos y comprometidos con su contexto social. Agradecemos al Dr. Patricio Espinosa, Ph.D., Rector de la Universidad Central del Ecuador, por su apoyo a este proyecto, que refuerza el compromiso de la universidad con el avance de la filosofía en el país. También reconocemos la labor de la Dra. Julieta Logroño, Ph.D., Vicerrectora Académica y de Posgrado, y de la Dra. Katherine Zurita, Ph.D., Vicerrectora de Investigación, Doctorados e Innovación, cuyo respaldo académico ha sido clave para consolidar este espacio de diálogo y reflexión crítica. Finalmente, agradecemos a Edison Benavides, director de la Editorial Universitaria, por su valiosa colaboración para que esta colección se haga realidad. Su apoyo refleja el compromiso de la editorial con la difusión del conocimiento filosófico.

Finalmente, nos complace presentarles la COLECCIÓN FILOSÓFICA ACTUAL como un espacio vital para el pensamiento crítico, esencial para comprender nuestra realidad y promover la transformación social desde la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas de la Universidad Central del Ecuador.

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con prólogo de Jean Grondin e introducción de Facundo Bey

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Mi principal agradecimiento está dedicado a todos los autores que participaron de este volumen por aceptar formar parte del proyecto y hacernos llegar sus valiosas contribuciones. Quiero manifestar aquí mi más profunda gratitud al Profesor Jean Grondin, cuya generosidad al redactar el prefacio de este libro representa un honor incalculable. Asimismo, extiendo mi reconocimiento al Profesor Santiago Zarria y a la Profesora Micaela Díaz, cuyo apoyo ha sido esencial para la realización de esta obra.

\*

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all the contributors to this volume for their willingness to participate in this project and for their invaluable contributions. I am particularly indebted to Professor Jean Grondin, whose gracious acceptance to write the preface to this book represents an inestimable honour. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to Professor Santiago Zarria and Professor Micaela Díaz, whose support has proved essential to the completion of this work.

# PRÓLOGO / PROLOGUE

Hans-Georg Gadamer se habría sentido muy complacido al ver un título como "Cuestiones abiertas / Open Questions" para una colección de ensayos dedicados a su pensamiento. Para él, la filosofía consistía esencialmente en plantear preguntas, preguntas fundamentales que, a su vez, solo pueden conducir a más preguntas. Las verdaderas preguntas eran para él preguntas abiertas. Las preguntas cuyas respuestas ya se conocen, como las retóricas o las pedagógicas, por no mencionar las inquisitoriales, no eran para él verdaderas preguntas. ¿Qué aporta este cuestionamiento sin fin?, podría preguntarse. Amplía nuestros horizontes y nos hace conscientes de los límites de las respuestas que damos por sentadas.

Sus grandes maestros fueron formuladores de preguntas. Hay que pensar aquí en Sócrates, quien planteó la pregunta por el Bien para confundir a aquellos que, como los sofistas, pretendían saber qué era (según Gadamer, este cuestionamiento socrático permaneció como hilo conductor en Platón y Aristóteles). Podríamos también pensar en Heidegger, quien notoriamente planteó una sola pregunta, la del Ser, y vio toda la tradición occidental como una serie de respuestas grandiosas pero insatisfactorias a esta cuestión. Al hacerlo, al menos según la aguda lectura de Gadamer, también planteó nuevamente la pregunta por lo divino. En el caso de ambas preguntas, sería difícil afirmar que Heidegger encontró alguna vez respuestas definitivas, pero su incesante cuestionamiento demostró la indigencia de la mayoría de las respuestas y la importancia de mantener las preguntas abiertas.

Plantear preguntas es también lo que ocurre en el diálogo, del cual Gadamer era tan afecto. Mantuvo, como es ampliamente conocido, diálogos épicos con grandes contemporáneos como Emilio Betti, Jürgen Habermas y Jacques Derrida, así como con muchos de sus discípulos e incluso visitantes ocasionales, podría añadirse. Aprendió mucho de ellos, ya que abrieron la hermenéutica, es decir, la búsqueda de la comprensión, a nuevos campos de investigación, nuevamente, más a través de sus preguntas que de sus res-

puestas. Sin embargo, en ocasiones, Gadamer debió sentir que sus interlocutores estaban a veces demasiado seguros de sí mismos, sin advertir siempre que la hermenéutica trata de poner en cuestión las propias certezas.

Esto es lo que nos enseña la experiencia, según argumentó Gadamer en Wahrheit und Methode. La persona experimentada no es aquella que ha acumulado un tesoro de conocimientos, sino quien ha aprendido a plantear preguntas y la sabiduría de reconocer los límites del propio saber. La verdadera experiencia es, por tanto, la experiencia de la propia finitud. Encontró la mejor fórmula para esta experiencia en el pathei mathos (aprender por medio del sufrimiento) de Esquilo, una intuición, subraya Gadamer en una de mis joyas ocultas favoritas de Wahrheit und Methode, que reconoce "en su significación metafísica la historicidad interna de nuestra experiencia" (GW 1, p. 363), unos 2400 años antes de que la historicidad se convirtiera en un problema filosófico (sin mencionar la referencia afín a la metafísica). Esta intuición, que no somos dioses, sino solo frágiles y cuestionantes cañas que se mecen en los vientos del tiempo, solo puede nutrir un espíritu de cuestionamiento y una apertura al punto de vista de los otros, quienes podrían tener razón. La lógica de las humanidades que Gadamer derivó de esta experiencia fue, por tanto, una de pregunta y respuesta, donde las respuestas siempre dan lugar a nuevas preguntas.

Hans-Georg Gadamer se habría sentido complacido al ver que esta excelente colección reúne autores, cuestionadores, que provienen de diferentes países, orígenes y generaciones. Encontraremos aquí académicos destacados y consolidados, así como pensadores emergentes, como se encuentra por ejemplo en los mejores diálogos de Platón (pienso particularmente aquí en el *Parménides*, pero esto es cierto para la mayoría de sus diálogos). Es realmente impresionante y reconfortante ver que, más de 125 años después de su nacimiento, el pensamiento de Hans-Georg Gadamer continúa atrayendo un interés tan vivo en el mundo entero y en las generaciones más jóvenes con sus inquietudes y nuevas perspectivas sobre los desafíos del hoy junto a las tradiciones filosóficas que nos

han sido legadas. Esta apertura y el futuro que augura lo habrían llenado de esperanza, sin la cual nadie puede vivir, tal como solía repetir. Es un inmenso mérito de Facundo Bey haber reunido una colección tan cautivadora de voces que continúan planteando preguntas con Gadamer y muy en su espíritu.

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Hans-Georg Gadamer would have been very happy to see a title such as "Cuestiones abiertas / Open Questions" for a collection of essays devoted to his thinking. For him, philosophy was all about raising questions, fundamental questions, which in turn can only lead to more questions. True questions were for him open questions. Questions to which one already knows the answers, like the rhetorical or the pedagogical question, to say nothing about the inquisitorial question, were not real questions for him. What does this openended questioning bring, one could ask? It broadens our horizons and makes us aware of the limits of the answers we take for granted.

His great masters were question raisers. One has to think here of Socrates, who raised the question of the Good in order to confound those who, like the Sophists, pretended they knew what it was (according to Gadamer, this Socratic questioning remained a guiding thread in Plato and Aristotle). One could think of Heidegger who famously raised only one question, that of Being, and saw the entire Western tradition as a series of grand, but unsatisfying answers to this question. In so doing, at least according to Gadamer's acute reading, he also raised anew the question of the divine. In the case of both questions, one would be hard-pressed to say that Heidegger ever found any definitive answers, but his relentless questioning demonstrated the indigence of most of the answers and the importance of keeping the questions open.

Raising questions is also what happens in dialogue, of which Gadamer was so found. He conducted, as is widely known, epic dialogues with great contemporaries such as Emilio Betti, Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, as with many of his pupils and

even casual visitors, one could add. He learned a great deal from them, since they opened up hermeneutics, i.e., the quest for understanding, to new fields of inquiry, again more through their questions than their answers. However, at times, Gadamer must have felt that his interlocutors were sometimes too sure about themselves, not always realizing that hermeneutics is about calling into question one's own certainties.

This is what experience teaches us, he argued in Truth and Method. The experienced person is not one who has accumulated a treasure trove of knowledge, but one who has learned to raise questions and the wisdom to recognize the limits of one's own knowledge. True experience is thus the experience of one's own finitude. He found the best formula for this experience in Aeschylus' pathei mathos (learning through suffering), an insight, underlines Gadamer in one of my favorite hidden gems of Wahrheit und Methode, that recognizes "in its metaphysical significance the inner historicity of our experience," (GW 1, p. 363; 2020, p. 365) some 2400 years before historicity became a philosophical issue (to say nothing about the sympathetic reference to metaphysics). This insight, that we are not gods, only fragile and questioning reeds dangling in the winds of time, can only nourish a spirit of questioning and an openness to the point of view of others, who could be right. The logic of the humanities Gadamer derived from this experience was thus one of question and answer, where answers always give birth to new questions.

Hans-Georg Gadamer would have been delighted to see that this fine collection assembles authors, questioning authors, who hail from many different countries, backgrounds and generations. One will encounter here stellar, well-established scholars as well as emerging thinkers, as one finds for example in the best dialogues of Plato (I am particularly thinking here of the *Parmenides*, but this is true of most of his dialogues). It is indeed impressive and rejoicing to see that, more than 125 years after his birth, the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer continues to attract such vivid interest in the entire world and in younger generations with their anxieties

and new perspectives on the challenges of today and the traditions of philosophy that have been bequeathed to us. This opening and the future it portends would have filled him with hope, without which no one can live, he kept repeating. It is to the immense credit of Facundo Bey that he has put together such an enthralling collection of voices that continue raising questions with Gadamer and very much in his spirit.

Jean Grondin Université de Montréal

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# INTRODUCCIÓN / INTRODUCTION CUESTIONES ABIERTAS / OPEN QUESTIONS

## Facundo Bey

La hermenéutica filosófica, tal como la concibió Hans-Georg Gadamer, representa una de las contribuciones más significativas y duraderas al pensamiento filosófico contemporáneo. En un mundo marcado por la fragmentación del saber y las tensiones interculturales, su filosofía de la comprensión ofrece posibilidades que trascienden disciplinas y tradiciones. *Gadamer. Cuestiones abiertas / Open Questions*, busca explorar la vigencia y riqueza de su pensamiento desde una variedad de perspectivas que abordan interrogantes abiertas y reinterpretaciones críticas.

Con la publicación de este volumen bajo el sello de la Editorial Universitaria de la Facultad de Filosofía de la Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE), de la Filosófica Editorial de la Fundación de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos y Culturales, y con el respaldo académico de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas de la misma universidad, se da continuidad al proyecto editorial de la Serie Colección Filosófica Actual. Además, su carácter bilingüe refuerza la vocación de abrir un diálogo entre diversas tradiciones filosóficas. Esta obra constituye también un sentido y humilde homenaje a Hans-Georg Gadamer, con motivo del centésimo vigésimo quinto aniversario de su nacimiento.

El objetivo principal de este volumen es iluminar la relevancia contemporánea del pensamiento gadameriano al tiempo que se abordan nuevas preguntas que surgen de su legado. Las contribuciones aquí reunidas abarcan (al menos) cinco grandes áreas temáticas: "Lenguaje, tradición e interrogación en la hermenéutica filosófica", "Razón, significado y ciencia", "Ética, política, filosofía práctica", "Filosofía y religión", y "Gadamer y los clásicos". Cada una de estas secciones ofrece un enfoque singular que no solo analiza aspectos fundamentales de la obra de Gadamer, sino que tam-

bién extiende sus ideas a nuevos campos, demostrando su fertilidad en contextos interdisciplinarios.

La primera parte del volumen ofrece un examen profundo y multifacético de conceptos fundamentales de la hermenéutica gadameriana, articulando particularmente las relaciones entre lenguaje, tradición, verdad y mundo. Los cuatro capítulos que la componen desarrollan aspectos complementarios que iluminan la radicalidad del pensamiento de Gadamer.

John Arthos abre esta sección con un análisis crítico de la relación entre tradición y subjetividad en Gadamer. Su contribución revela una tensión fundamental: mientras Gadamer busca superar el subjetivismo moderno y su enfoque en la interioridad romántica y cristiana, la estetización decadente de la experiencia y las diversas teorizaciones del sujeto colectivo, su propio compromiso con el lenguaje humanista de la personalidad, experiencia y comprensión sugiere que tal superación puede haber sido excesiva. Arthos propone recuperar elementos de la comprensión hermenéutica previa de la personalidad para corregir esta "sobrecorrección" gadameriana, argumentando que la experiencia subjetiva, aunque no sea el fundamento primario de la comprensión, constituye un elemento irreductible en la estructura del entendimiento hermenéutico. Su análisis se enriquece con una discusión sobre la no-transferibilidad (Unübertragbarkeit) de Friedrich Schleiermacher y la corporalidad en Maurice Merleau-Ponty, proponiendo una visión más matizada de la relación entre subjetividad y tradición.

Nathan Eric Dickman desarrolla una innovadora contribución a la hermenéutica filosófica al abordar una pregunta crucial que había quedado sin respuesta en la obra de Gadamer: si el preguntar tiene prioridad hermenéutica, ¿qué tipo específico de pregunta tiene esta prioridad? A través de una lectura que combina hermenéutica filosófica, teoría de los actos de habla y pedagogía, Dickman argumenta que las taxonomías existentes de preguntas (incluyendo la distinción entre preguntas de "orden superior" e "inferior") y la clasificación estándar de las preguntas como "directivas" son insuficientes para capturar la especificidad de las preguntas que tienen

prioridad hermenéutica. Como contribución original, propone una nueva categoría de actos ilocucionarios que denomina "suspensivos", caracterizados no por buscar primariamente respuestas sino por crear un espacio de indeterminación donde los prejuicios y juicios se mantienen en suspenso, permitiendo que emerjan múltiples posibilidades de significado.

Dieter Teichert examina las ambigüedades fundamentales que surgen en la hermenéutica gadameriana en torno a la relación entre lenguaje, historicidad y verdad. Por medio de un detallado análisis histórico-conceptual que rastrea el desarrollo de la hermenéutica desde sus orígenes en la filología alejandrina hasta su transformación en una hermenéutica universal con Gadamer, Teichert identifica una tensión central en el proyecto gadameriano: por un lado, Gadamer se distancia de los enfoques sistemáticos orientados a la metodología de la interpretación, rechazando la posibilidad de una teoría científica exhaustiva del lenguaje debido a su circularidad inherente; por otro lado, mantiene un compromiso con la tradición hermenéutica clásica y sus preocupaciones metodológicas. Esta tensión se manifiesta especialmente en su tratamiento del círculo hermenéutico, donde Teichert demuestra cómo Gadamer oscila entre una concepción ontológica del comprender como Geschehen que trasciende la subjetividad del intérprete, y un reconocimiento de la necesidad de criterios epistémicos y metodológicos para la interpretación válida.

Eddo Evink desarrolla una novedosa interpretación de la hermenéutica gadameriana al mostrar cómo el concepto de *Spiel*, originalmente introducido por Gadamer como clave para comprender la ontología de la obra de arte, puede extenderse para articular una metafísica hermenéutica implícita en su obra. A través de un minucioso análisis de *Wahrheit und Methode*, Evink demuestra que el juego no es solo un modelo para entender el arte, sino que opera como estructura fundamental en toda la filosofía gadameriana: desde la fusión de horizontes en la comprensión histórica hasta la universalidad del lenguaje. El juego, caracterizado por un movimiento de vaivén que trasciende la subjetividad de los "jugadores" y

encuentra su fin en sí mismo, revela cómo los seres humanos están siempre ya inmersos en contextos y relaciones que no pueden ser completamente objetivados ni controlados. Esta metafísica del juego permite a Evink resolver la aparente tensión en Gadamer entre su rechazo a la metafísica onto-teológica tradicional y sus propias pretensiones de universalidad hermenéutica, mostrando cómo el juego emerge como una metáfora conceptual que captura la condición hermenéutica humana sin cristalizarse en conceptos estáticos.

La segunda parte del volumen aborda las tensiones entre razón, significado y pensamiento científico desde una perspectiva hermenéutica. A través de tres contribuciones distintas pero complementarias, esta sección interroga la relación entre el pensamiento gadameriano y diversas formas de comprender la ciencia, la razón y el significado.

Babette Babich desarrolla una aguda reflexión sobre la relación entre Gadamer y Friedrich Nietzsche respecto a la cuestión de la ciencia, partiendo de la formación de ambos autores en filología clásica. A partir de un minucioso trabajo interpretativo, Babich demuestra cómo la crítica nietzscheana al triunfo del método científico sobre la ciencia encuentra eco en la hermenéutica gadameriana, particularmente en su cuestionamiento de la universalización del método de las ciencias naturales. La autora revela cómo ambos pensadores, desde la tradición filológica, problematizan la transformación galileana del objeto científico y el papel de las matemáticas en la constitución de la ciencia moderna, enfatizando el rol central que juega el concepto de cuestionamiento [Fragen] en su comprensión de la ciencia.

Roger W. H. Savage trabaja sobre la relación entre razón, historia y el problema hermenéutico universal. Su análisis parte de la idea gadameriana de que la razón se manifiesta solo en situaciones históricas concretas, explorando cómo las obras, palabras y actos aumentan el campo de nuestras experiencias. Savage argumenta que el núcleo poético del *logos* y la operación metafórica que conduce a la creación de nuevos significados contrarresta la fascinación por deconstruir el pensamiento metafísico. Su crítica de la razón

ilustrada abre la puerta a un renovado compromiso con la finitud humana, la razón y la verdad, donde la capacidad de trascender lo real desde dentro adquiere su especificidad concreta en aquellas circunstancias en las que la idoneidad de tales obras y actos se manifiesta históricamente.

Mirela Oliva examina la relación entre significado y evolución partiendo del análisis de la lectura del libro de David Haig From Darwin to Derrida. La autora argumenta que la atribución de historicidad, interpretación y significado a los seres vivos es coherente con la definición aristotélica de estos como automovientes. Oliva muestra cómo la hermenéutica alemana heredó la biología aristotélica y le añadió la discusión sobre la historia, proponiendo que los principios hermenéuticos de los seres vivos son visibles en la evolución. Los seres vivos poseen una temporalidad peculiar a través de su movimiento propio porque el cambio es parte de su identidad. El carácter histórico implica la interpretación de información y la búsqueda de significado, donde la autorrealización de los seres vivos es propositiva y requiere novedad.

La tercera parte del volumen estudia las dimensiones ética y política de la hermenéutica gadameriana, enfocándose específicamente en sus implicaciones para la filosofía práctica contemporánea gracias a dos contribuciones complementarias que abordan la virtud de la responsabilidad y la sabiduría práctica como recursos para enfrentar desafíos democráticos actuales.

Luiz Rohden desarrolla una fundamentación propia de la virtud epistémica de la responsabilidad a partir de la hermenéutica gadameriana. Sostiene que vivir responsablemente significa responder a los llamados de la vida de una manera que nos haga más plenos y contribuya a nutrir la trama de la existencia. Rohden identifica tres dimensiones fundamentales de la responsabilidad hermenéutica: hacia uno mismo (mediante el autoconocimiento y cuidado de sí), hacia los otros (a través de la solidaridad y la práctica política transformadora), y hacia la naturaleza (reconociendo nuestra pertenencia a su tejido vital). A diferencia de las concepciones que ven la responsabilidad como un imperativo externo, Rohden argumen-

ta que ésta es un componente intrínseco de nuestro modo humano de pensar y actuar que nos lleva a responder libre y conscientemente en las circunstancias singulares de la vida.

Darren Walhof investiga cómo la concepción gadameriana de la *phronesis* podría servir como antídoto contra la desinformación y las teorías conspirativas que amenazan la democracia contemporánea. Por medio de la evaluación de la investigación empírica sobre teorías conspirativas y la recuperación gadameriana de la tradición platónico-aristotélica, Walhof argumenta que fomentar la *phronesis* como capacidad cívica para realizar juicios contextualizados sobre fines y medios puede ayudar a los ciudadanos a sentirse cómodos en situaciones de incertidumbre y complejidad, resistiendo así el alarmismo y las narrativas melodramáticas que caracterizan la desinformación. La sabiduría práctica hermenéutica debe incluir disposiciones como la humildad epistémica, la fortaleza frente a presiones reputacionales y la comodidad con la incertidumbre, permitiendo a los ciudadanos juzgar lo bueno y posible en contextos sociopolíticos específicos.

Los dos capítulos que forman parte de la cuarta parte del libro, dedicada a Filosofía y Religión, indagan cómo Gadamer conceptualiza la experiencia religiosa y su relación con el pensamiento filosófico, revelando tanto su distanciamiento de la interpretación straussiana como su original aproximación "clásica" a la cuestión de lo divino.

Walter Lammi recupera la relación entre religión y filosofía en un análisis comparativo de Gadamer y Leo Strauss, revelando sus discrepancias fundamentales sobre la interpretación del pensamiento griego. Por medio de un examen detallado de tres dicotomías clásicas—filosofía vs. experiencia cultual, *logos* vs. *mythos*, y theoría vs. praxis—Lammi argumenta que mientras Gadamer encuentra una interconexión esencial entre filosofía y religión mediada por la experiencia artística y cultual, Strauss insiste en su necesaria separación para preservar la autonomía del pensamiento filosófico. La interpretación gadameriana reconoce en el discurso de la experiencia cultual la aporía fundamental de la filosofía mis-

ma, permitiendo comprender tanto los límites del *logos* como la unidad de *theoría* y *praxis* en la experiencia de lo divino, mientras que Strauss enfatiza la discontinuidad radical entre razón filosófica y experiencia religiosa.

Abdullah Başaran se concentra sobre la filosofía de la religión de Gadamer como una aproximación "clásica" que trasciende las creencias religiosas tradicionales para centrarse en la experiencia humana de la finitud. En sus reflexiones, que ponen en común la influencia de la teología de Rudolf Bultmann, la recuperación de la unidad premetafísica entre palabra y cosa, y la lectura de textos clásicos como vía de acceso a lo divino, Başaran argumenta que Gadamer desarrolla una apreciación estética de la experiencia religiosa. Esta perspectiva, que enfatiza la universalidad de la confrontación con la mortalidad, permite un diálogo intercultural sobre lo divino que mantiene su relevancia en un mundo postmetafísico, donde la experiencia artística y la lectura atenta emergen como formas privilegiadas de comprensión de nuestra finitud.

La última parte del libro, continua algunas de las líneas de investigación del apartado anterior y vincula el pensamiento de Gadamer con la tradición clásica, mostrando tanto cómo su enfoque puede enriquecer nuestra comprensión de los textos antiguos como la relevancia fundamental de la filosofía platónica para el desarrollo de la hermenéutica.

Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire examina la ambivalencia fundamental en el tratamiento gadameriano de Aristóteles en Wahrheit und Methode, tensionado entre la apropiación entusiasta de la phronesis como modelo para la comprensión hermenéutica y el rechazo de la concepción aristotélica de la experiencia. Con agudeza, Pageau-St-Hilaire argumenta que la crítica de Gadamer a la dimensión acumulativa de la empeiría aristotélica resulta problemática para su proyecto de apropiación de la ética del estagirita, ya que la formación del juicio práctico requiere necesariamente una experiencia que construya disposiciones estables. Esta tensión revela un desafío más profundo para la hermenéutica gadameriana: reconci-

liar la conciencia de la finitud con la posibilidad de un conocimiento práctico efectivo.

Einar Iván Monroy Gutiérrez retoma la interpretación gadameriana de los pensadores iniciales, mostrando cómo Gadamer construye un diálogo vivo con los presocráticos a través de la mediación platónico-aristotélica. Monroy Gutiérrez, con el rigor filológico y profundidad filosófica de su lectura, argumenta que Gadamer supera tanto el esquematismo de las traducciones de Hermann Diels y Walther Kranz como los excesos interpretativos de Nietzsche y Martin Heidegger, inaugurando una nueva posibilidad de lectura de los presocráticos. La originalidad de su aproximación radica en establecer un círculo hermenéutico virtuoso donde los presocráticos no son solo interpretados desde Platón y Aristóteles, sino que estos últimos son comprendidos como efectuales de aquellos.

El autor, Facundo Bey, culmina el volumen con un examen del primer acercamiento de Gadamer a la filosofía platónica, centrándose en su obra de 1931 Platos dialektische Ethik. A través del análisis de este texto, Bey revela cómo la interpretación de Gadamer de la dialéctica platónica como teoría de la posibilidad objetiva del diálogo marcó un decisivo distanciamiento del pensamiento de Heidegger, particularmente en lo que respecta a la relación entre ética y política. El capítulo demuestra cómo la temprana comprensión de Gadamer de la pólis como modo de ser de los seres humanos mundanos lo llevó a desarrollar una posición filosófica propia donde la dimensión ético-política de la comprensión emerge a través del diálogo genuino con otros. Bey argumenta que esta temprana divergencia de la filosofía heideggeriana—especialmente en lo concerniente a los conceptos de Miteinandersein (ser-unos-conotros) y la naturaleza de la finitud humana—resultó crucial para el posterior desarrollo de la hermenéutica filosófica. El autor sostiene que el enfrentamiento inicial de Gadamer con Platón ya contenía las semillas de una concepción dialógica del entendimiento que moldearía fundamentalmente su pensamiento maduro, al tiempo que ilumina las implicaciones políticas de su ruptura con Heidegger durante el período más crítico de la historia alemana.

"Toda pregunta que se plantea como tal ya no es meramente una pregunta recordada. Como rememoración de lo entonces preguntado, es ahora lo que es puesto en cuestión de nuevo. En tal modo, el preguntar supera la historicidad de nuestro pensar y conocer", afirmaba Gadamer (GW 2, p. 503). Este volumen aspira a catalizar un renovado compromiso con la tarea inagotable de la interpretación y del pensar. Los ensayos aquí reunidos demuestran cómo la hermenéutica filosófica de Gadamer continúa iluminando cuestiones fundamentales a través de diversas regiones en las que cada vez se pone en juego el preguntar—desde el lenguaje hasta la tradición, la historia, la ética, la política, la religión, la ciencia, la experiencia estética y el pensamiento antiguo. Fiel al espíritu gadameriano, cada una de las perspectivas que ofrece este libro expone una o varias respuestas provisionales a preguntas que permanecen perpetuamente abiertas, especialmente para aquellos que son capaces de leer por sí mismos y verdaderamente permiten que algo les sea dicho. En una era marcada por la pleonexia y la polarización, esta obra cumplirá mejor su propósito si los lectores de este volumen abordan cada contribución brindando el tipo de escucha atenta que el diálogo genuino exige, involucrándose con estos ensayos como si de movimientos de una exploración polifónica de vigorosas preguntas se tratara, preguntas a la vez ajenas y familiares, distantes y cercanas. Que esta colección promueva el cultivo de la responsabilidad hermenéutica y el tipo de comprensión abierta y solidaria que nuestro presente requiere: con la esperanza de que nos recuerde que "todos los enunciados son respuestas. Pero esto no es todo. La pregunta con respecto a la cual cada enunciado es una respuesta está ella misma a su vez motivada, y así, en cierto sentido, cada pregunta es ella misma nuevamente una respuesta. Responde a un desafío. Sin una tensión interna entre nuestras expectativas de sentido y las opiniones generalizadas, y sin un interés crítico en las opiniones comúnmente dominantes, no habría pregunta alguna" (Gadamer, 1991, p. 102).

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics represents one of the most significant and enduring contributions to contemporary philosophical thought. In a world marked by the fragmentation of knowledge and intercultural tensions, his philosophy of understanding offers possibilities that transcends disciplines and traditions. *Gadamer. Cuestiones abiertas / Open Questions*, seeks to explore the relevance and richness of his thought from a variety of perspectives that address open questions and critical reinterpretations.

With the joint publication of this volume by the University Press of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Central University of Ecuador (UCE) and the Filosófica Press of the Foundation for Philosophical, Political, and Cultural Studies, supported by the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at UCE, the editorial project of the *Colección Filosófica Actual* series advances. Furthermore, the bilingual character of this volume reflects our commitment to fostering dialogue between diverse philosophical traditions. Additionally, this work also serves as a heartfelt and humble tribute to Hans-Georg Gadamer on the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of his birth.

The primary aim of this volume is to illuminate the contemporary relevance of Gadamerian thought whilst addressing new questions arising from his legacy. The contributions gathered here encompass (at least) five major thematic areas: "Language, Tradition and Questioning in Philosophical Hermeneutics", "Reason, Meaning and Science," "Ethics, Politics Practical Philosophy," "Philosophy and Religion," and "Gadamer and the Classics." Each of these parts offers a unique approach that not only analyses fundamental aspects of Gadamer's work but also extends his ideas to new fields, demonstrating their fertility in interdisciplinary contexts.

The first part of the volume offers a deep and multifaceted examination of fundamental concepts in Gadamerian hermeneutics, particularly articulating the relationships between language, tradition, truth and world. The four chapters that comprise it develop complementary aspects that illuminate the radicality of Gadamer's thought.

John Arthos opens this section with a critical analysis of the relationship between tradition and subjectivity in Gadamer. His contribution reveals a fundamental tension: whilst Gadamer seeks to overcome modern subjectivism and its focus on romantic and Christian interiority, the decadent aestheticisation of experience and various theorisations of the collective subject, his own commitment to the humanist language of personality, experience and understanding suggests that such overcoming may have been excessive. Arthos proposes recovering elements of the previous hermeneutic understanding of personality to correct this Gadamerian "correction," arguing that subjective experience, though not the primary foundation of understanding, constitutes an irreducible element in the structure of hermeneutic understanding. His reading is enriched by a discussion of Friedrich Schleiermacher's non-transferability [Unübertragbarkeit] and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's corporeality, proposing a more nuanced view of the relationship between subjectivity and tradition.

Nathan Eric Dickman offers an innovative contribution to philosophical hermeneutics by addressing a crucial question that had remained unanswered in Gadamer's work: if questioning has hermeneutical priority, what specific type of question has this priority? By combining philosophical hermeneutics, speech act theory and pedagogy, Dickman argues that existing taxonomies of questions (including the distinction between "higher-order" and "lower-order" questions) and the standard classification of questions as "directives" are insufficient to capture the specificity of questions that have hermeneutical priority. As an original contribution, he proposes a new category of illocutionary acts which he terms "suspensive," characterised not by primarily seeking answers but by creating a space of indeterminacy where prejudices and judgements are held in abeyance, allowing multiple possibilities of meaning to emerge.

Dieter Teichert investigates the fundamental ambiguities that arise in Gadamerian hermeneutics concerning the relationship between language, historicity and truth. In his historical-conceptual examination tracing the development of hermeneutics from its origins in Alexandrian philology to its transformation into a universal hermeneutics with Gadamer, Teichert identifies a central tension in the Gadamerian project: on the one hand, Gadamer distances himself from systematic approaches oriented towards interpretation methodology, rejecting the possibility of an exhaustive scientific theory of language due to its inherent circularity; on the other hand, he maintains a commitment to the classical hermeneutic tradition and its methodological concerns. This tension manifests itself especially in his treatment of the hermeneutic circle, where Teichert demonstrates how Gadamer oscillates between an onto-logical conception of understanding as *Geschehen* that transcends the interpreter's subjectivity, and a recognition of the need for epistemic and methodological criteria for valid interpretation.

Eddo Evink develops a novel interpretation of Gadamerian hermeneutics by illustrating how the concept of Spiel, originally introduced by Gadamer as key to understanding the ontology of the work of art, can be extended to articulate an implicit hermeneutic metaphysics in his work. Drawing upon a meticulous study of Wahrheit und Methode, Evink demonstrates that play is not merely a model for understanding art, but operates as a fundamental structure throughout Gadamer's philosophy: from the fusion of horizons in historical understanding to the universality of language. Play, characterised by a to-and-fro movement that transcends the subjectivity of the players and finds its end in itself, reveals how human beings are always already immersed in contexts and relationships that cannot be completely objectified or controlled. This metaphysics of play enables Evink to resolve the apparent tension in Gadamer between his rejection of traditional onto-theological metaphysics and his own claims to hermeneutic universality, evincing how play emerges as a conceptual metaphor that captures the human hermeneutical condition without crystallising into static concepts.

The second part of the volume elucidates the tensions between reason, meaning and scientific thought from a hermeneutical perspective. Through three distinct but complementary contributions, this section surveys the relationship between Gadamerian hermeneutics and various ways of understanding science, reason and meaning.

Babette Babich develops a reflection on the relationship between Gadamer and Friedrich Nietzsche regarding the question of science, beginning with their shared background in classical philology. In her comprehensive investigation, Babich demonstrates how the Nietzschean critique of the triumph of scientific method over science finds an echo in Gadamerian hermeneutics, particularly in his questioning of the universalisation of natural science methods. The author reveals how both thinkers, from the philological tradition, problematise the Galilean transformation of the scientific object and the role of mathematics in the constitution of modern science, emphasising the central role that the concept of questioning [Fragen] plays in their understanding of science.

Roger W. H. Savage scrutinises the relationship between reason, history and the universal hermeneutical problem. His essay begins from the Gadamerian idea that reason manifests itself only in concrete historical situations, exploring how works, words and acts increase the field of our experiences. Savage argues that the poetic core of logos and the metaphorical operation that leads to the creation of new meanings counteracts the fascination with deconstructing metaphysical thought. His critique of Enlightenment reason opens the door to a renewed engagement with human finitude, reason and truth, where the capacity to transcend the real from within acquires its concrete specificity in those circumstances where the suitability of such works and acts manifests itself historically.

Mirela Oliva addresses the relationship between meaning and evolution through an analysis of David Haig's book *From Darwin to Derrida*. The author argues that the attribution of historicity, interpretation and meaning to living beings is consistent with the Aristotelian definition of these as self-movers. Oliva demonstrates how German hermeneutics inherited Aristotelian biology and added to

it the discussion of history, proposing that the hermeneutical principles of living beings are visible in evolution. Living beings possess a peculiar temporality through their own movement because change is part of their identity. The historical character implies the interpretation of information and the search for meaning, where the self-fulfilment of living beings is purposive and requires novelty.

The third part of the volume explores the ethical and political dimensions of Gadamerian hermeneutics, focusing specifically on its implications for contemporary practical philosophy through two complementary contributions that address the virtue of responsibility and practical wisdom as resources for confronting current democratic challenges.

Luiz Rohden develops his own foundation for the epistemic virtue of responsibility based on Gadamerian hermeneutics. He maintains that living responsibly means responding to life's calls in a way that makes us more complete and contributes to nurturing the fabric of existence. Rohden identifies three fundamental dimensions of hermeneutical responsibility: towards oneself (through self-knowledge and self-care), towards others (through solidarity and transformative political practice), and towards nature (recognising our belonging to its vital fabric). Unlike conceptions that view responsibility as an external imperative, Rohden argues that it is an intrinsic component of our human way of thinking and acting that leads us to respond freely and consciously in the singular circumstances of life.

Darren Walhof examines how the Gadamerian conception of *phronesis* might serve as an antidote to disinformation and conspiracy theories that threaten contemporary democracy. Integrating empirical research on conspiracy theories with the Gadamerian recovery of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, Walhof argues that fostering phronesis as a civic capacity for making contextualised judgements about ends and means can help citizens feel comfortable in situations of uncertainty and complexity, thus resisting the alarmism and melodramatic narratives that characterise disinformation. Hermeneutical practical wisdom must include disposi-

tions such as epistemic humility, resilience in the face of reputational pressures and comfort with uncertainty, enabling citizens to judge what is good and possible in specific sociopolitical contexts.

The fourth part of the book, dedicated to Philosophy and Religion, addresses through its two chapters how Gadamer conceptualises religious experience and its relationship to philosophical thought, revealing both his departure from the Straussian interpretation and his original 'classical' approach to the question of the divine.

Walter Lammi delves into the relationship between religion and philosophy through a comparative analysis of Gadamer and Leo Strauss that reveals their fundamental disagreements about the interpretation of Greek thought. By examining three classical dichotomies—philosophy vs cultic experience, *logos* vs *mythos*, and *theoría* vs *praxis*—Lammi argues that whilst Gadamer finds an essential interconnection between philosophy and religion mediated by artistic and cultic experience, Strauss insists on their necessary separation to preserve the autonomy of philosophical thought. The Gadamerian interpretation recognises in cultic speech the fundamental aporia of philosophy itself, allowing an understanding of both the limits of *logos* and the unity of *theoría* and praxis in the experience of the divine, whilst Strauss emphasises the radical discontinuity between philosophical reason and religious experience.

Abdullah Başaran studies Gadamer's philosophy of religion as a "classical" approach that transcends traditional religious beliefs to focus on the human experience of finitude. Weaving together the influence of Rudolf Bultmann's theology with the recovery of the pre-metaphysical unity between word and thing, and the reading of classical texts as a pathway to the divine, Başaran argues that Gadamer develops an aesthetic appreciation of religious experience. This perspective, which emphasises the universality of the confrontation with mortality, enables an intercultural dialogue about the divine that maintains its relevance in a post-metaphysical world, where artistic experience and attentive reading emerge as privileged forms of understanding our finitude.

The final part of the book continues some of the research lines from the previous section and connects Gadamer's thought with the classical tradition, demonstrating both how his approach can enrich our understanding of ancient texts and the fundamental relevance of Platonic philosophy for the development of hermeneutics.

Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire enquires into the fundamental ambivalence in Gadamer's treatment of Aristotle in *Wahrheit und Methode*, pulled between the enthusiastic appropriation of *phronesis* as a model for hermeneutic understanding and the rejection of the Aristotelian conception of experience. With acuity, Pageau-St-Hilaire argues that Gadamer's critique of the cumulative dimension of Aristotelian *empeiria* proves problematic for his project of appropriating Aristotelian ethics, since the formation of practical judgement necessarily requires an experience that builds stable dispositions. This tension reveals a deeper challenge for Gadamerian hermeneutics: reconciling the consciousness of finitude with the possibility of effective practical knowledge.

Einar Iván Monroy Gutiérrez takes up Gadamer's interpretation of the early thinkers, showing how Gadamer constructs a living dialogue with the pre-Socratics through Platonic-Aristotelian mediation. With philological rigour and philosophical depth, the author argues that Gadamer overcomes both the schematism of Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz's translations and the interpretative excesses of Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, inaugurating a new possibility for reading the pre-Socratics. The originality of his approach lies in establishing a virtuous hermeneutical circle where the pre-Socratics are not only interpreted through Plato and Aristotle, but the latter are understood as effectual of the former.

The author, Facundo Bey, culminates the volume with an examination of Gadamer's earliest engagement with Platonic philosophy, focusing on his 1931 work *Platos dialektische Ethik*. Through a meticulous analysis of this formative text, Bey reveals how Gadamer's interpretation of Platonic dialectic as the theory of dialogue's objective possibility marked a decisive departure from Heidegger's thought, particularly regarding the relationship between ethics and

politics. The chapter demonstrates how Gadamer's early understanding of the  $p\acute{o}lis$  as the mode of being of worldly human beings led him to develop a distinctive philosophical position where the ethico-political dimension of understanding emerges through genuine dialogue with others. Bey argues that this early divergence from Heideggerian philosophy—especially concerning the concepts of Miteinandersein (being-with-one-another) and the nature of human finitude—proved crucial for the later development of philosophical hermeneutics. The author argues that Gadamer's initial confrontation with Plato already contained the seeds of a dialogical conception of understanding that would fundamentally shape his mature thought, while simultaneously illuminates the political implications of his break with Heidegger during the most critical period in German history.

"Every question that is posed again as such is no longer merely remembered. As a recollection of what was once questioned, it becomes a question again and is now asked anew. In this way, the act of questioning sublates the historicity of our thinking and knowing," Gadamer argues (GW 2, p. 503). This volume aspires to catalyse renewed engagement with the inexhaustible task of interpretation and thinking. The collected essays assembled herein demonstrate how Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics continues to illuminate fundamental questions across diverse domains in which questioning itself is continuously at stake—from language to tradition, history, ethics, politics, religion, science, aesthetic experience, and ancient thought. True to the Gadamerian spirit, each perspective offered in this book gives a sign, one or several provisional answers to questions that remain perpetually open, especially for those who are able to read for themselves and actually let something be said to them. In an era marked by pleonexia and polarisation, this work will best fulfil its purpose if readers approach each contribution by bestowing the attentive listening that genuine dialogue demands, engaging with these essays as movements in a polyphonic exploration of vigorous questions both alien and familiar, distant and near, all at once. May this collection advance the cultivation of hermeneutical responsibility and the kind of open, solidarious understanding that our present moment requires: with the hope that it reminds us that "all statements are answers. But that is not all. The question to which each statement is an answer is itself motivated in turn, and so in a certain sense every question is itself an answer again. It responds to a challenge. Without an inner tension between our anticipations of meaning and the all pervasive opinions and without a critical interest in the generally prevailing opinions, there would be no questions at all" (Gadamer, 1991, p. 102; 1981, p. 107).

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# PRIMERA SECCIÓN FIRST PART

# LENGUAJE, TRADICIÓN E INTERROGACIÓN EN LA HERMENÉUTICA FILOSÓFICA

LANGUAGE, TRADITION, AND
QUESTIONING IN
PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

# CAPÍTULO I / CHAPTER I ISTRADITIONTRULY ATHOU?

John Arthos

#### RESUMEN

La polémica perenne de Gadamer contra el subjetivismo moderno incurrió en una sobrecorrección. Siguiendo a Heidegger posterior al giro, el persistente llamado de Gadamer a moverse "más allá de la subjetividad" emanó de su animadversión no solo contra el Cogito racionalista de la filosofía moderna, sino también contra el cultivo cristiano y romántico de la interioridad (Innerlichkeit), la estetización decadente de la experiencia (Erlebnis), la ideología reduccionista del individualismo occidental y su opuesto, las diversas teorizaciones sociales del sujeto colectivo. En última instancia, esta crítica multidimensional no logra reconciliarse plenamente con el profundo compromiso de Gadamer con el lenguaje humanista de la personalidad, la experiencia y la comprensión. Su reelaboración y resignificación de estos términos para equipararlos a la riqueza ontológica de la identidad hermenéutica ha legado a las humanidades un patrimonio humanista renovado. No obstan-

te, omite un rasgo indispensable al que deberemos retornar para garantizar su transmisión. Tras explicitar la crítica multifacética de Gadamer a la subjetividad moderna y la compleja identidad hermenéutica resultante, propondré recuperar un aspecto de la comprensión hermenéutica anterior de la personalidad para rectificar la sobrecorrección gadameriana.

Palabras clave: subjetivismo, persona, conciencia, ipseidad, experiencia, Geist.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Gadamer's life-long polemic against modern subjectivism overcorrected. Following Heidegger after the turn, Gadamer's persistent plea to move "beyond subjectivity" sprang from his animus not only against the rationalist Cogito of modern philosophy, but also the Christian and Romantic cultivation of inwardness (Innerlichkeit), the decadent aestheticization of experience (*Erlebnis*), the reductive ideology of Western individualism, and its opposite, the various social theorizations of the collective subject. In the end this multipronged broadside does not fully reconcile with Gadamer's deep commitment to the humanist language of personhood, experience, and understanding. His reworking and repurposing of these terms to match the ontological richness of hermeneutic identity has bequeathed to the humanities a newly invigorated humanist legacy. In the end, however, it leaves out an indispensable feature that we will need to return for its safe passage. After explicating Gadamer's multifaceted critique of modern subjectivity and the complex hermeneutic identity that results, I will recommend that we retrieve an aspect of the earlier hermeneutic understanding of personhood to correct Gadamer's overcorrection.

**Keywords:** subjectivism, person, consciousness, selfhood, experience, *Geist*.

#### 1. Introduction

In 1975 Gadamer took a radical step forward on the polemical theme that had guided his work —We must not just correct the modern overemphasis on the autonomous intellect, the transcendental subject, but indeed move "beyond subjectivity" itself (2019, p. 137). Although moving beyond the autonomous philosophical Subject became a commonplace and cornerstone of continental theory, there is in Gadamer's call to action something radically expansive, a secular echo of the Protestant idea that Christian identity formed in the word "goes beyond the individual's self-understanding, indeed, beyond his individual being" (1976a, p. 45). Ten years later Gadamer confirmed this radical intention "to eliminate the concept of subjectivity and consciousness completely from the thematic of ontology" (2019, p. 257). Eliminationist language was not typical for Gadamer, but on this point he became increasingly categorical.

Despite the clarify of this call, there remains significant ambiguity in what Gadamer meant by this project of excommunication. In particular I want to interrogate what is meant by the word "beyond" in these formulations, a word which can be read either in a relative or absolute sense. My interrogation will drill down into Gadamer's basic argument, clarify the ontology that results, and identify a weakness in its structure that I believe should be remedied.

We can start by setting Gadamer's intention within some rough parameters. "Beyond subjectivity," we will see, is more practically grounded than Hegel's Geist, and more communal than Heidegger's embrace of the possibilities that finitude prescribes. Because Gadamer thought that Hegel went too far in identifying reason with spirit, and that Heidegger failed to appreciate in its fulness the sociality of *Mitsein*, Gadamer looked back to the Athenian *polis*—as it is expressed both in Plato's dialogic practice and Aristotle's ideal of civic friendship—as an exemplar for the anti-subjectivism with which he most identified. This ancient clue is supplemented by much else that Gadamer draws on from Trinitarian theology, the metaphor of play, Protestant pietism, German historicism, and speculative metaphysics. While these accretions multiply the epis-

temic, cultural, and historical dimensions of a rich hermeneutic sociality, they can obscure as much as augment our sense of what that hermeneutic identity is. But we have at least the basic coordinates: Gadamer wants to carve out a hermeneutic space between the extremes of subjective individualism and speculative idealism. So if we want to pinpoint what that Gadamerian in-between is, we first will need to flesh out its complex attributes.

## 2. The Many Facets of Gadamer's Anti-Subjectivism

I have grouped these peculiarities in three categories—first, that in the extant texts an ambiguity persists between the call for relative *deemphasis* or absolute *elimination* of subjectivity; second, that Gadamer's ambiguous mixing of the language of subjectivity, consciousness, selfhood, and personhood is an essential feature of his anti-subjectivism; and finally, that his sense of subjectivity is a culturally inflected theme that encompasses far more than just the philosophical epistemology of the subject.

De-emphasis or Elimination? Gadamer's virulent antipathy to the modern subject might sometimes tempt us to think he means "beyond" altogether. In *Truth and Method* he speaks dismissively of "the impotence of subjective particularity" (1994, p. 489). He acknowledges his own "radical" intention "to eliminate the concept of subjectivity and consciousness completely from the thematic of ontology" (2007, p. 92; 2019, p. 257). He asserts that indeed "there is no individual consciousness at all in which a spoken language is actually present" (1976, p. 64). From this Heideggerian orientation, "we are not this single individual, and we do not even know who 'we' are" (2019, p. 136). Gadamer's expressed reason for following Heidegger after the turn was because he "abandoned the dimension of subjectivity even more fundamentally" (p. 137).

But there is good reason to avoid this categorical dismissal. For example, in 1985 Gadamer refashions the idea of selfhood without discarding it: "To be in a conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another" (1989, p. 110). Much of the time he uses the

language of demotion rather than elimination: Self-consciousness should remain "subordinate" (1976b, p. 109). At other times he resorts to the language of deposition. Hermeneutics has "banished not only the concept of consciousness from its central position, but also the concept of selfhood as such" (1976, p. 50). In ordinary conversation, "the hermeneutic dimension goes beyond the sort of thinking that is based on consciousness, that is, beyond what German philosophy calls self-consciousness'—'Selbstbewuβtsein.'" (1997, p. 41). Here he is asking for addition, not subtraction. His attack on the intentionalist fallacy—"Who as poets speak? Would it not be more appropriate there to say only that the poem speaks? uses comparative language (p. 144). Even his famously punishing language in Truth and Method—that "the self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life," and that "the focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror"—is not absolute (1994, p. 276). In one instance, Gadamer makes an outright admission: "How then is language present? Certainly not without the individual consciousness" (1976, p. 64).

If we take this relative demotion as Gadamer's position, decentering does not rob the speaking-listening human of their capacities, but refocuses our attention instead on the place where "everything is gathered":

The Greeks had no word for the 'subject' They also had no word for 'language'. *Logos* is what is said, what is named, what is gathered together and laid down. This is not seen from the standpoint of the speakers' capacities, but rather from the standpoint of that in which everything is gathered together and upon which we are in mutual agreement. (Gadamer, 2019, p. 245)

Since the appeal here to shift the standpoint from speaker's capacities to the matter under consideration does not *deny* capacities, this is an ameliorative argument.

An eliminationist perspective would carry heavy entailments for the ethotic profile of hermeneutics. The thing that makes Gadamer's crusade against the modern subject such a puzzle is that it does not seem to extend to the dimension of the personal. Here I will recommend to you Dieter Misgeld, who captures Gadamer's deeply personalist ethos beautifully. Philosophical hermeneutics, Misgeld reminds us, "associates the transformative power of dialogue with the conversation between friends or a conversation between those who have something in common that they love and honor" (1990, p. 165). There is something intimate and deeply human about this form of exchange, an ethos fed by Gadamer's classically humanist roots going all the way back to Aristotle's ideal civic friendship and the human engagement modeled in Plato's dialogues. True dialogue "entails the absence of strategic thinking" or "hidden motives" that would "violate the condition of trust required for dialogue" (Misgeld, 1990, p. 168). In fact, Misgeld attributes a certain naiveté to a hermeneutics that leaves unaddressed the massive role of instrumentalist communication that lives outside this idealized vision. But the one thing it cannot be accused of is impersonal abstraction.

The Cross-Contamination of Associated Concepts. If Gadamer's ultimate goal was "to eliminate the concept of subjectivity and consciousness from a hermeneutic ontology" what does this mean for the allied Western concepts of self, individual, and person? (Gadamer, 2019, p. 257). To get at this question we first need to hear Gadamer's comfortable inclusion of these idioms of personhood and individuality in his philosophical voice:

Hermeneutics may be defined as the attempt to overcome this distance in areas where empathy was hard and agreement not easily reached. There is always a gap that must be bridged. Thus, hermeneutics acquires a central place in viewing human experience. . . . This feeling for the individuality of persons, the realization that they cannot be classified and deduced according to general rules of laws, was a significant new approach to the concreteness of the other. (1984, p. 57)

This easy trading in the language of selfhood would suggest a first cut that marginalizes or eliminates subjectivity and consciousness as specialized terms-of-art that have to be cauterized from these ordinary language idioms. But as we will see, that division does not resolve the matter cleanly, because Gadamer's crusade against the subject also eats into the discourse of persons and individuals.

More than once Gadamer lays out the history of the concept of the person in the Western tradition, but leaves unclear, as David Vessey has complained, how this concept intersects, overlaps with, or is contaminated by the concept of the subject (Vessey, 2014, pp. 136–37). Despite Gadamer's obvious appreciation for aspects of legal and theological personhood, he takes Scheler to task for centralizing "the concept of the person," and for asserting that social "ethics should never replace the individual conscience" (Gadamer, 1999b, p. 111). It is widely known that Gadamer's antisubjectivism was deeply influenced by Julius Stenzel, who blamed the German classical scholarship of the time for transposing its own *Persönlichekultur* back onto ancient Greek culture.

What I mean by cross-contamination is the inmixing among the family of loosely related concepts that have gathered around modern notions of subjectivity. Gadamer did not carefully disaggregate these concepts, and so they overflow into each other in his thinking. His multi-faceted sense of modern subjectivism blended the transcendental subjectivity of the philosopher with the personalism of the mystic, with the pietist and the romantic poet. Famously, he gave a name to the historical-cultural understanding "that goes beyond the individual's self-understanding, indeed, beyond his individual being"—he called it "Ilessness" (1976a, pp. 45, 65). Indeed, and these words were the impetus for my paper's title, he even went so far as to say that it "is not really we ourselves who understand" (p. 58). This is because, as he explained, "there is no individual consciousness at all in which a spoken language is actually present" (p. 64). Thus, in 1962, Gadamer placed selfhood and consciousness in the recycle bin along with subjectivity:

[Heidegger's] concentration on the historicity of self-understanding banished not only the concept of consciousness from its central position, but also the concept of selfhood as such. For what is more unconscious and "selfless" than that mysterious realm of language in which we stand and which allows what is to come to expression, so that being "is temporalized" (sich zeitigt)? (1976a, p. 50)

But then somehow an equally adamant limit appears on the other side of the equation. Gadamer wants nothing to do with a supra-subjective Geist (das Übersubjekt)" (2001, p. 51; 1993, p. 29): "I would ask, against Hegel: Is the first and last principle in which the philosophical thinking of being culminates really "Geist"? (1997, p. 35). Linguistic being does not exist "either as the subjectivity of individual consciousness or as that of the spirit of a people" (1976a p. 79). In a similar vein Gadamer criticized Heidegger's later poetizing of linguistic being, what he called "Heidegger's ontotheology," because it abstracted from the common sense world of people and lives (1997, p. 48). Gadamer wished neither to eliminate personhood nor to hypostasize it, so what he did was to complicate it: "The word is what one person speaks and another understands. How does presence play a role in this? Who listens at all to his or her own voice? And who understands what he or she merely hears?" (1989, p. 95). This triple challenge to immediate presence, and individual identity, and personal understanding forces us to work out Gadamer's ontological vision of a Gesprächsleben that undermines the boundaries of place and time without dissolving them.

Multi-Dimensional Polemic. Gadamer's anti-subjectivism is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. There is no doubt that his principal nemesis and polemical target is the modern philosophical concept of the "Subject" as it developed in Descartes' Cogito, Kant's autonomous reason, Hegel's self-consciousness, and Husserl's transcendental ego. But that much is a term-of-art that circumscribes philosophical epistemology. Gadamer's anti-subjectivism is not at all confined to this specialized thematic<sup>1</sup>. In an important essay on the subject he distils three distinct elements of modern subjectivity—"the soulful tonalities of Christian inward-

<sup>1</sup> You could of course say that Hegel and Kant include far more than that, so I am referring here to the mainline reception of the idea of the philosophical Subject as a specialized term.

ness, the pathos of the free and independent subject, and the absolute preeminence of self-consciousness" (GW 6, p. 116, my translation). So it is incumbent on us in the first place to discriminate the various layers of Gadamer's polemic. They could be divided in different ways; here I group them in three categories.

a. The Transcendental Subject. I embrace fully, as I think most of us do, Gadamer's main polemical intent, which is to distance culture and thought from the distortions and reductions of the modern ideology of the autonomous rational mind. The gift of reason gave reassurance to Enlightenment thinkers that humanity could control its fate, see its own motives, direct the conduct of society, determine truth and right, etc. Wellworn objections to this signature of the Western mind—many of which stem directly from Heidegger—have been so thoroughly rehearsed that there is no need to provide yet another summary. Gadamer was an ally in the effort to temper this misguided belief in our sovereign self-determination and imperious domination over nature. What is in our control is to cultivate an awareness of our dependency on all that works vis a tergo, responding to that forming pressure with humility and sensitivity to its unfolding possibilities.

The secondary literature sometimes identifies Gadamer's anti-subjectivism with this one theme, treating philosophical hermeneutics simply as an alternative "mode of epistemological theory" (Davey, 2020, p. 2). This is a reduction. Gadamer was taking on the entire cultural, ideological, economic, political, moral edifice of a modernity that was built, layer upon layer, on the hypostatization of the individual as its foundation. This is why Gadamer turned to Hegel, who taught him that the Enlightenment attribution of animal rationis capax could not be confined within the walls of philosophy. As a humanist taking in the whole range of Western civilization, Gadamer's target is richly multi-faceted, just as focused on the inwardness of the Christian or Romantic soul thrust back upon itself, the misguided 19<sup>th</sup> century cult of author and artist as creative genius, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century aestheticist obsession with *Erlebnisse*, the self-indulgent excesses of contemporary "experience

culture," and the ahistorical rationalization of managerial societies. Gadamer's critique of modern subjectivity is a comprehensive attack on the individualist, subjectivist orientation of religious, ethical, and cultural dimensions of the modern Western world.

This diversity is brought home in the very structure of *Truth and Method*, which opposes the subjectivist caste of modern judgment in all its forms—cultural, epistemic, aesthetic—to the classical values of practical judgement, taste, and experience. Gadamer's winding journey through Augustinian rhetoric, Renaissance humanism, Protestant theology, and German historicism sets him on the threshold of hermeneutics as a capacious alternative to and repudiation of a modern ideology tainted by subjectivism in every sphere of contemporary life.

b. The Mythology of the Inner Self. Ironically I have just mentioned Augustine in a positive light, but he developed the language of inwardness that took root in the Christian ideal of the pious life, which in turn nurtured the Western ideology of the individual. He developed a fulsome figural language to bring this idea home—"the innermost recesses of the soul," "the chambers of the heart," "the interior man"—which then became commonplaces in Medieval and Renaissance devotional literature (1967, pp. 8–9). This imagery flowed uninterruptedly into the secular literature of the early modern period, although what was discovered in this inner searching was not God but oneself: "For many years now my thoughts have had no other aim but myself. I have studied and examined myself only, and if I study any other things, it is to apply them immediately to or rather within myself" (Montaigne 2003, p. 331). In 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, Goethe rang all the changes of this theme: "Being everywhere a stranger, thou findest in thy own heart the most agreeable society" (1839, p. 127). And then to Gadamer's great consternation, Dilthey adopted this cultivation of inward experience as the academic focus of the Geisteswissenschaften. Dilthey took Jean Jacques Rousseau's study of his own "personal inner experience" as a model for the hermeneutic science of understanding (Dilthey, 1985, p. 264).

It would be impossible to exaggerate how influential the Christian orientation to the inner life of the soul has been in shaping Western notions of the individual, the subject, and the person. For this reason Gadamer took direct aim at traditions of inwardness sparked by Augustine, nourished in Christian mysticism and pietism, and appropriated into secular Romanticism and the counter-Enlightenment. The first and second part of Truth and Method traces what Gadamer believed was modernity's errant exchange of the humanist standards of sensus communis, civic identity, taste, Bildung, etc. for the narrowed authority of the sovereign self, the apotheosis of which emerged in aesthetic consciousness, the ideology of the Romantic genius, the aestheticized cult of the inner life (1994, p. 59). All of this was a significant part of why, in shifting from an intellectual history to a programmatic account of philosophical hermeneutics in Truth and Method, he made the momentous decision "to follow Hegel rather than Schleiermacher" (p. 173). Much of the first twothirds of Truth & Method is an attack on the cult of the author, the Romantic genius, and associated with these, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Erlebniskult with its lionization of aestheticized existence, its indulgence in the interior life of the Romantic self, its sacralization of the soul thrust back upon itself.

Gadamer regarded the culture which this produced as "extravagantly self-indulgent" (1994, p. 88). Even the idea of solitude as a good, for Gadamer, was suspect: "Indeed, it really isn't obvious that anyone would want to go for a walk alone. Perhaps that's just peculiar to the age of introspection" (1999b, p. 103). He coined the term "aesthetic differentiation" to denominate the self-centered artistic sensibilities of late 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics. We are likely more familiar with the still iconic representatives of this aestheticized sensibility such as Oscar Wilde, Huysmans, and Mallarmé, but Gadamer's targets all showed the same inclination: "Instead of art's preparing us for true moral and political freedom, we have the culture of an 'aesthetic state,' a cultured society (*Bildungsgesellschaft*) that takes an interest in art" (1999b, p. 83). The literary aesthete of this period, he commented wryly, "seems distinguished by the

complete independence of his creativity and thus acquires the characteristic social features of an outsider whose style of life cannot be measured by the standards of public morality. The concept of the bohemian which arose in the nineteenth century reflects this process" (1999b, pp. 87–88).

Gadamer's animus, however, is caught up in a certain tension. Granting all of its excesses, Gadamer had tremendous respect for the humanist traditions that were marked by and flowed out of Augustine's highly personal style of reflective awareness. Gadamer acknowledged that "the soulful tonalities of Christian inwardness" were part and parcel of the humanist heritage that nourished his hermeneutics, and you hear those intimate personal idioms as a signature of his own style. His 1969 public lecture "Isolation as a Symptom of Self-Alienation" seems to me an attempt to lessen the distance between dialogic community and a person's inner life by insisting that a healthy solitude is not introspection, but still a conversation with an other (nature, a poem, one's own past): "So what is sought in the quest for solitude is not actually solitude, but 'abiding' with something, undisturbed by anyone or anything else" (1998, p. 103). Gadamer's distancing from this tradition seems to be caught up in an equally powerful belonging.

c. Ignoring Non-Transferable Experience. We can see how Dilthey's hermeneutic concept of Erlebnis became serviceable for the deplorable modern emergence of the "experience society" (Erlebnisgesselschaft), reinforcing the massive cultural apparatus of subjective individualism that has penetrated into every corner of our lives (Pine and Gilmore, 2011, p. 1). Gadamer was of course a great proselytizer against the degradations of mass consumer society, and he zeroed in on the close connection between Romantic aesthetics and its popularized expression in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Erlebniskult. His proposal to replace this individually inflected term for experience with Erfahrung (social-historical experience) as a hermeneutic watchword is in fact the thematic backbone of the first third of Truth and Method. This exchange is a move that allows Gadamer to bypass a question that was at the center of Schleiermacher's con-

struction of a hermeneutic perspective, which I will return to in my conclusion as a monumental attempt to negotiate the gap or tension between the subjective individuality of experience and the shared destiny of communities.

And again to the tension, Gadamer's account of the ideal of *Erlebnis* within the *Lebensphilosophie* is fairminded and sympathetic, so he was not immune to its charms. The structure of aesthetic experience in many ways anticipates the structure of hermeneutic experience: "This concept implies a connection with totality, with infinity" (1994, p. 63). "Every act, as an element of life, remains connected with the infinity of life that manifests itself in it" (p. 64). It "immediately represents the whole, its significance is infinite" (p. 70). Gadamer gives a simply beautiful summary of the testimonial authority of an *Erlebnis* as a portal onto understanding that transcends the immediate moment:

Erleben means primarily "to be still alive when something happens." Thus the word suggests the immediacy with which something real is grasped—unlike something which one presumes to know but which is unattested by one's own experience, whether because it is taken over from others or comes from hearsay, or whether it is inferred, surmised, or imagined. What is experienced is always what one has experienced oneself. (1994, p. 61)

Gadamer's description of an experience remembered ("*Erlebte*") is not unlike his description of a hermeneutic text or a work of art:

But at the same time the form "das Erlebte" is used to mean the permanent content of what is experienced. This content is like a yield or result that achieves permanence, weight, and significance from out of the transience of experiencing.. [It] merely offers a starting point for interpretation—material to be shaped—and its discovered yield, its lasting result. (1994, p. 61)

But Gadamer's sympathetic account of *Erlebnis* might just be an example of his reflexive hermeneutic charity. He explained once when looking back at his work that "a more dialogic mood suffuses

my writing. I like to listen to others, and I am always tempted to find and acknowledge the strong point of their argument against me" (1988, p. 27). I think in the end the reason why the enlarged presence of vision that an *Erlebnis* provides is not what Gadamer would consider *Gleichzeitigkeit*, hermeneutic contemporaneity, in that it lacks the Hegelian structure of negation, "the breach of otherness," that gives it an unfinalizable sociality (p. 96). The finite-infinite insight of an *Erlebte* is contained within one's own personal understanding, and so makes no room for the correction of the cultural and historical other.

## 3. Gadamer's Ordinary Language Strategy

Gadamer wanted to replace "the language of metaphysics" by "the words used in our everyday language," and he did (1997, p. 48). "I really would like to know what understanding," he wrote in a fit of pique, "has to do with metaphysics" (1989, p. 96). He was quite candid about this preference: "I have not been able to follow Heidegger, or anybody else, when they speak of the 'language of metaphysics,' the 'right language of philosophy,' or the like. Language, for me, is always simply that which we speak with others and to others" (1989, p. 98). His corpus from beginning to end, with a remarkable integrity that was almost unique to him among his peers, is a transposition of the abstraction and poetizing of the speculative tradition to everyday idioms of speaking and listening. When Gadamer translated what Hegel called Geist and Heidegger called Sein into the common ordinary language of speaking and listening, he was not engaged in a dodge or a reduction. His colloquial simplicity preserves the prerogatives of both personhood and historicity.

Yet Gadamer's simplified language has the ambiguity of any language that uses fewer and more basic words to say complex things. This is more than style; it goes to the heart of Gadamer's obscure and complex position on subjectivity. When he casts his beyond-subjectivity position in the very human terms of speaker, listener, dialogue, and so forth, it is not just a manner of speaking. This comes clear finally in his late correction to the over-correc-

tion of Heidegger's beyond-subjectivity project with which Gadamer was allied. In 1993 Gadamer wrote that "language is not only the house of being; it is the house of the human being, a house where one lives, which one furnishes, and where one encounters oneself, or oneself in others" (2001, p. 58). To make sure we don't miss the implication of this discrimination, he later explained, "I still favor the singular! Only the individual human being has a thou [ein Du]. The plural sounds too collective to me" (p. 58).

So another thing that makes a simple verdict on Gadamer's anti-subjectivism difficult is that he thought it out of a hybrid of traditions that did not produce an uncomplicated opposition. The classical rhetorical humanism that inhabits his voice works against a clean contrast. His often-declared intention to develop his thought in a vernacular tongue rather than in the metaphysical or poetizing idioms of his mentors manifests itself in the common idioms of selfhood and person. The compression of the technical terms of speculative ontology into a vernacular language produces a deceptive simplicity—The keyterms "presence," "existence," "experience," "self," "understanding," "history," "I," and "we" develop a hermeneutic richness and flexibility that rely heavily on ideas that he is ostensibly moving away from. The repurposing and borrowings that go on in this linguistic exchange show the productive ambiguity in Gadamer's thought that I wish to highlight. I will treat each of these techniques—repurposing and substitution—in turn.

a. Repurposing. It is extraordinary that the terms we most associate with modern Western biases of subjectivity—self, understanding, consciousness, etc., are not only not discarded by Gadamer but actively taken up in his positive program. He attempts to reinvest, remake, and repurpose them as hermeneutic constructs.

We can see a focused example of this repurposing in Gadamer's 1962 *The Problem of Self-Understanding*, which is a commentary on Rudolph Bultmann's famous essay *New Testament and Mythology*. Gadamer rightly observes that what Bultmann calls self-understanding for Christians is to be understood as a relationship, a living bond to the New Testament, and as such "goes beyond the indi-

vidual's self-understanding, indeed, beyond his individual being" (Gadamer, 1976a, p. 45). Bultmann had reinterpreted the Pauline kerygma through the lens of Heidegger's dissident understanding of historical being, which replaced the historian's idea of history as an objective account of the past with history as an event of encounter which the person of faith experiences and is a part of. There was a reciprocal borrowing here, insofar as Heidegger's radical ontology was already prefigured in Pauline teaching, which Bultmann explains when he says that the life of Jesus cannot be understood "as an historical event only through historical reports," but as a living encounter with the word of proclamation (p. 26). This means that the Biblical word as it is read and spoken today is in fact part of the body of Christ. Bultmann quotes Paul's words "in my flesh I complete what remains of Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church" (Col. 1:24). Informed by long Protestant tradition, Bultmann does not read this verse metaphorically. The historical body of Christ, the proclaiming word of the gospel, and the institutional presence of the church are interpenetrating and consubstantial with each other, which means that (Christian) history is continually enacted in its ongoing reception. This way of thinking, transposed to a secular philosophy, explodes the idea of "self" in "self-understanding" to an historical community bound together across radically different modes of being (living human beings, written and spoken texts, habitual practices). The positive sense of "self" for Gadamer is always "we" rather than an isolated "I", and always an historical "we" mediated by textual traditions.

Now, Bultmann acknowledges that this is not a common-sense way of thinking: "The paradox of the presence of the transcendent God in history is affirmed: 'the word became flesh'" (1984, p. 42). John's dictum (1:14) references the birth of Christ as the incarnate fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures, but Bultmann notes that transubstantiation works in the other direction too: The resurrection is both the physical return of a body from the dead and the ongoing proclamation of the word. This logic is at work in Gadamer's belief that self-understanding is that of an historical community

bound together across modalities of being. It asserts "the priority of the relation over its relational members" (Gadamer, 1976a, p. 50). We have to grasp the radical ontological implication implicit in the idea that such a self-understanding is inclusive of both "the interpreter as well as what is interpreted" (p. 58). Ironically, Bultmann surfaces the distinction that makes the paradox of transubstantiation a leap that Gadamer makes so easily:

Would not one have to understand it as the cross of the historical Jesus in order to understand it in its meaning? Would not we then have to have recourse to the historical Jesus? For the first proclaimers this was the case. They experienced the cross. (Bultmann, 1984, p. 36)

Despite the boundary-jumping metastasis of the concepts of self and understanding in this repurpose, Gadamer's reading of Bultmann is not a total "extinguishing of the individual"; but rather, that a "hermeneutical consciousness" that is founded on "a common understanding," a "deep common accord" (1976a, pp. 6, 7). Thus the ongoing dialogue necessitated by a hermeneutics of finitude creates, as Gadamer puts it, a "continuity of self-understanding in which human existence moves" (1994, p. 96).

Even Gadamer's second-most despised bugbear of consciousness (after subjectivity) gets a positive spin and repurposing in his guiding concept of wirkungsgeschliches Bewußtsein. When asked to explain why he chose to stick with this notorious Enlightenment signifier, Gadamer defended himself this way: "The fact that I make use of the concept of consciousness at all, a term whose ontological bias Heidegger had clearly demonstrated in Being and Time, to me only represented an accommodation to what seemed a natural usage of language" (1997, p. 46). This answer reveals Gadamer's stylistic strategy. One of his abiding polemics was against the growing dominance in modernity of the 'realm of the expert,' and the way he could resist that trend in his own discipline was to speak in a way that lay persons could understand. To make it accessible, the commonly available "consciousness" would just have to stretch to accommodate a hermeneutic ontology.

"Experience" is perhaps Gadamer's most famous repurpose, because his counter-intuitive explanation for what hermeneutic experience means is the reverse of what we conventionally think. We think of an experienced person as someone with an accumulated wisdom that will yield reliable judgment, but for Gadamer the experienced person who is someone who is keenly aware of their own ignorance. Their wisdom is only that they will not be tempted to predict based past fact, because they are attuned to the radical contingency of life. The experienced person will therefore encourage dialogic conversation to remedy their own limited perspective. One more strike against subjective authority.

b. Substitution. Gadamer works out the "priority of the relation over the relational members" in a verbal substitution of plural for the singular pronoun: "We" rather than "I." In a polemical mood he proclaimed in 1966: "There is nothing like an "I and Thou" at all—there is neither the I nor the Thou as isolated, substantial realities. Something enduring is already present [in] the 'we' that we all are" (1976a, pp. 7, 8). This substitution (we) is what Gadamer calls "hermeneutic identity" (1986, p. 26). In a performative tour de force, he demonstrates what this substitution looks like in his 1985 academic memoir, Philosophical Apprenticeships. He wrote himself here as a hermeneutic self, one that exists "between" self and other, student and teacher, context and tradition. The purposefully ironic epigraph on the book's title page is de nobis ipsis silemus, "of ourselves we are silent." Gadamer justifies his bankshot approach to memoir at the end of the book by saying that it is "impossible to win insight into an individual's true being in isolation from his particular social relationships" (1985, p. 172). It is not that Gadamer wished to hide or obscure his life in some way—he dispatches with the autobiographical task in the first five pages of the book with a few brief and telling strokes—yet that parsimony is part and parcel of his anti-subjectivist argument. Gadamer took the commemorative opportunity of this book to demonstrate what a hermeneutic identity is, making the account of each of his mentor's intellectual perspectives serve as a refracting prism for his

own socially constituted identity. Each respectful tribute has the trademark ambiguity of Gadamer's style, leaving plenty of respectful space for his unspoken differences and distances. It is all an unfinished conversation. The portrait thus painted is in an eminent way precisely the relational sense of self-understanding Gadamer wishes to promote.

Presence is another concept that Gadamer revised through an exchange. Immediate presence is of course one of the critical targets of Heidegger and his followers, because it remains captive to the subjective experience of the individual. Gadamer wanted to hold onto some version of presentness, which he called Gleichzeitigkeit, the connection that is actualized across peoples, cultures and traditions when an enduring work of art is experienced throughout history: "I have tried to show that the peculiarly human quality of our existence arises in that union of past and present . . . that in our relationship with the world and in all of our creative labors—forming or cooperating in the play of form as the case may be—our accomplishment lies in retaining what threatens to pass away" (1986, pp. 46, emphasis added). The "work" (in both senses as process and product) of the creative imagination is a distinctively human capacity to confront and engage the enduring questions of existence.

Another substitution occurs subtly in a moment when Gadamer wants to distance himself from the Hegelian ambition that he associates with self-consciousness:

"Self-understanding" ... does not refer at all to the unshakable certainty of self-consciousness. Rather, *Selbstverständnis* has a pietistic undertone suggesting precisely that one cannot succeed in understanding oneself and that this foundering of one's self-understanding and self-certainty should lead one to the path of faith. (1989, p. 97)

Here the linguistic undertones of "self-understanding" correct for the totalizing force of Hegel's preferred term.

One could go on—"History" is a term that Gadamer both repurposes and exchanges. He leans heavily on Heidegger's exchan-

ge of *Historie* (the objectivizing research of history scholars) for *Geschichte* (the essential historicality of Dasein). But the above list should be sufficient to demonstrate Gadamer's technique of repurposing and substitution to make ordinary language speak the complex ontology of philosophical hermeneutics.

# 4. What Ontology in View?<sup>2</sup>

In his 1990 "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," Gadamer spoke of the challenge of conversation partners with irreconcilable differences as a paradigm for non-subjectivist understanding. It "is the other who breaks into my egocenteredness and gives me something to understand" (1997, p. 46). This break is not the end of a conversation but the beginning. When an individual is struck by the shock of an alien perspective, "the otherness of the Other is not overcome in understanding but rather preserved" (p. 41). Dialogue across difference is a bond of continual work. The temporal aspect of this work—"one never completely understands"—undermines any claim of the immediacy of individual insight (e.g., the vision of the whole that an Erlebnis supposedly grants) (pp. 43–44). The adventure of the negative sends us on an infinite conversation that rudely interrupts "the inner enclosedness of Bewuβtseinsidealismus—an idealism based on consciousness—and the whirlpool of its movement of reflection that sucks everything up into immanence" (p. 45).

And yet, as seems more likely, Gadamer believed we should demote rather than dismiss the "I" of subjectivity. It cannot be missed that Gadamer acknowledges the unavoidable place of the understanding person in the communication of meaning: "Even if reading is not a reproduction process, every text one reads is only realized in understanding" (1997, pp. 53). Gadamer therefore *does* appreciate the distinct *contributions* of individuals, which is what makes hermeneutic identity a collaboration rather than a collective achievement. There is an ongoing back-and-forth between the experiencing person or community and the sheltering, preserving

<sup>2</sup> I borrow this title from the tenth study of Paul Ricoeur's Oneself as Another.

power of symbols, texts, monuments, and practices. The imprint of Schleiermacher as much as Hegel is still present in this oscillating reciprocity between lasting inscriptions and living encounters:

If it is through a word that that which what was at issue was raised up into the commonality of mutual understanding and then called forth, then it is at the same time in a word that it is lodged and sheltered, and it is through the word that it is disclosed, and now it can only be summoned back into memory either by the fleeting moment of self-crossing in question and answer, or on the basis of a permanent form into which it has been fixed. (1999a, p. 149)

We have here, to quote Natorp, "an indecomposable interrelationship" (2013, p. 25). What you see in Gadamer's description, though, is that what would be a back-and-forth between equal contributors in Schleiermacher is tilted heavily in favor of the word in Gadamer. The phrase "in the fleeting moment of self-crossing" reminds us the famous flickering in the closed circuits of historical life.

In this milder interpretation of Gadamer's "beyond," desubjectification is a decentering and demotion rather than dissolution and removal. Self-understanding, and here I have italicized the both/and syntax in the following quote to highlight Gadamer's crucial concession, "is not only grounded on the 'mineness' of my being [die Jemeinigkeit] that is revealed in the possibility of death, but at the same time encompasses all recognition of oneself in the other, which first opens up in dialogue" (1989, p. 95). Language (Sprache) is the medium of exchange, but there is an exchange:

The word is what one person speaks and another understands. How does presence play a role in this? Who listens at all to his or her own voice? And who understands what he or she merely hears? (Gadamer, 1989, p. 95)

These three questions will help us fix the hermeneutic relation. The second question ("Who listens?") is Gadamer's standard attack on self-consciousness—we are attending to the matter at hand rather

than to our own awareness, which is an altogether secondary issue. The third question ("Who understands?") replaces the immediate moment of understanding with an endless chain of questions and answers: "Every word is itself always an answer and gives rise always to a new question" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 95). The first question, a rhetorical one ("Does presence have a role?"), gives the temporality of self-understanding to history instead of to the finite witness. Gadamer's three questions altogether place individual finite understanding between a concessive ("not only") and a diminutive ("merely").

To this qualified concession and strict limitation Gadamer will always add what I will call an extending principle, and this extension offers us a glimpse of his ontology in a nutshell. If the individual person is perpetually fated to the limitation of a finite perspective, the event of understanding touches that person and in some degree transforms them: "It therefore also holds that for the text about to be read, the reader who gives the work its full presentness will experience an increase in being." (1997, p. 53). This is an ontology of participation, in the Platonic and Neoplatonic sense. In the exchange of being that a textual tradition potentiates, no one remains the same. There is no transcendent knower prior to reception.

So now we see a structural logic clarifying itself. From the side of history (Geschichte) we encounter the sublation of discontinuity in the coexistence that memory actualizes—this is a form of wholeness (Gleichzeitigkeit). From the side of finitude, the increase of being that leads finite experience towards that wholeness extends our finite understanding by a small degree out. The interface of these two dynamics—history beckoning individuals in the event of understanding—bring us to a second plateau of understanding for clarifying Gadamer's "beyond." It has three interlocking ontological features: 1. A text is realized, which means that the text has meaningful being. 2. It is realized only in understanding, which means that its meaning is wholly dependent on human beings. 3. But conversely a human being

who gives understanding receives their being from the text. This jumping across modes of being is like the chemical reaction of inert and reactive substances—life is catalyzed by the interaction, so each side (reader, text) is only half. Thus, what Gadamer considers "the hermeneutic continuity which constitutes our being" is "not a timeless present that presents itself to" the mind in the momentary access of an Erlebnis, but the full historical "continuity of self-understanding in which human existence moves" (1994, p. 97). This continuity *includes* even those perspectives that are "closed to our understanding [that] we ourselves experience as limiting" (p. 96). The continual shock of recognition of the limits of our own parochial viewpoints sparks its connections, like the electoral charge across the synapses in the brain.

All of this makes sense and feels right to me. But what I want to understand beyond this is this: What is the role of the experiencing subject, or soul, or reflective body in which, after all, all of this historical engagement has to be registered, worked through, reflected on, affirmed or rejected? I continue to insist that what Gadamer sometimes calls solidarity, which includes the belonging of family, the bonds of civic friendship, and the moral sense of the community, does not replace some ineliminable bit of what moderns came to think of as subjective consciousness.

Here is what I will say: Because our *Sprachlichkeit* is forged in the crucible of our fragile, fallible, ignorant, blind, inspired, inextricably personal bodily existence, that means that our sociality is always goings to be a piecemeal and patchquilt affair. Our understanding, never fully realized, as Gadamer is always reminding us, draws our finite selves to it by the very limitation that we feel. In fact Gadamer often thematizes this fitful connection. We as individuals are "drawn into an event" of understanding that "proposes and withdraws," (1994, pp. 490, 480). It has "captivated us before we can come to ourselves" (p. 490). We as individuals are pointed in its direction, but we arrive to see it, "as it were, too late" (p. 490). What we experience, therefore, is "only the flickering" of its vast, coruscating, glimmering circuitry (p. 276). What flashes upon

us, to use Heidegger's imagery, is the shard of some enormity in the glint of a lightning crack. If we can understand an author better than he understood himself, than I propose we see the modesty of hermeneutic continuity as a worn, rag-tag, patch-quilt affair.

To be clear, I am not sure Gadamer wrestles sufficiently with the gaps and wrinkles and tears of human solidarity. He frequently depicts this fitful process in rather optimistic, almost romantic terms. The recognition that binds us together sublates our fractured selves: "[T]he words we find capture our intending, as it were, and dovetail into relations that point out beyond the momentariness of our act of intending" (1976a, p. 56). The experience of art is the supreme exemplar for what Gadamer describes as a dovetailing process:

The pantheon of art is... the act of a mind and spirit that has collected and gathered itself historically. ... not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means that we sublate (*aufheben*) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence (1994, p. 97).

A passage late in *Truth and Method* goes equally far in suggesting an unbroken synthesis, a "continuity of memory" (*Kontinuität des Gedächtnisses*) that amounts to an "exceptional coexistence" (*einzigartige Koexistenz*) between contemporary readers and historical texts (GW I, pp. 393–394). If this description falls just a bit short of the notorious "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) language, it reaches a level of idealization that is hard to deny: "The ideality of the word is what raises everything linguistic beyond the finitude and transience that characterize other remnants of past existence" (1994, p. 390). Here the language of "beyond" evokes a kind of consummation. The continuity of memory that is incarnated in a "reading consciousness" overtops the categorical boundaries that separate living consciousness and textual inscription (p. 390). These descriptions achieve a remarkable degree of fullness and continuity for hermeneutic being:

In writing, language gains it true ideality, for in encountering a written tradition understanding consciousness acquires its full sovereignty. Its being does not depend on anything. Thus reading consciousness is in potential possession of its history. [...] Literature has acquired its own contemporaneity with every present. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 391)

Such a hermeneutic contemporaneity, Gadamer hastens to add, is not a function of persons or personal relationships: "It is not really a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who is perhaps quite unknown), but about sharing in what the text shares with us" (1994, p. 391). So Gadamer's idealistic tendencies need to be tempered by the ontological modesty that hermeneutic theory allows.

All of this brings us a major step closer to understanding what Gadamer's "beyond" means. Despite his equivocations, indeed what Dallmayr calls the "persistent oscillation or a certain halfheartedness of his 'ontological turn'," in the end Gadamer did consistently and categorically reject any kind of "super-subject," which means, both by straightforward inference and by the perduring notions of personhood and individuality that he repurposed and complicated, that Gadamer remains a standard-bearer for a philosophy of human being grounded in the classical humanist tradition (Dallmayr, 1989, p. 84; Gadamer, 1989, p. 111). His desire to banish subjectivity did not eclipse his grounding in the humanism that sustained classical, Renaissance, and Protestant cultures through the centuries despite the modern rationalist onslaught. This point is often lost on philosophers not well versed in the humanist rhetorical tradition that Gadamer is rooted in, and it is hugely in Gadamer's favor, so I am sure I will return to the topic.

Having resolved this much about Gadamer's complex, murky position on the location of experience, there is one final problem. How does any person, as a biological entity with its own organs of sensibility, process the meaning generated in this "peculiar intermediary realm" between the collective subject and the fully autonomous individual (1976, p. 79)? Gadamer is puzzled himself about this: "How then is language present? Certainly not without

the individual consciousness, but also not in a mere summation of the many who are each a particular consciousness for itself" (p. 64). In the end, of course, language (Sprache) acts as the intermedium, the passing baton, that cannot live in subjectivity, "either as the subjectivity of individual consciousness or as that of the spirit of a people" (p. 79). Yet this double exclusion ignores the question of my paper's title: Is tradition really a Thou? How fundamentally are we to take this analogy of historical experience (Erfahrung) as a conversationi partner? Heidegger in his own way confronted this question in his interrogation of *Jemeinigkeit*, the unique understanding that is in each case mine, a question that serves as the thematic backbone of Division Two on Dasein's temporality. Jemeinigkeit is how Heidegger thought about what Schleiermacher called non-transferability—the uniqueness of what is in each case mine. Indeed, when the analytic of human temporality in Being and Time circles around the problem of death, it is because of the wrenching fact that what goes away is that which is in each case mine. The prospect of that loss "puts Dasein's Being-in-the-world face to face with the 'nothing' of the world" (1962, p. 321). Gadamer did belatedly think and write about "bodily experience and the limits of objectification," and about "the experience of death," but when he did so, it was not about an embodied self as an exquisitely sensitive instrument of sensibility, feeling, and reflection through which what is meaningful is registered, comprehended, felt, processed, and lived, both along with and against others (1996, pp. 92–102, 125-40). The lack of this attention is certainly due in great part to his programmatic intention to push beyond the distortions of subjectivism, but its elision or suppression is a genuine lack, a missing piece for a hermeneutics with pretensions to an orientating paradigm. And hermeneutics in its longer tradition going back to Schleiermacher has robust resources to remedy that.

## 5. The Missing Piece

How would it do that? In one concessional moment Gadamer took us right up to the edge:

Clearly it is the task of the philosopher to investigate the revolutionary manner in which [the high level of self-conscious reflection which we all bring with us] has come about and to ask why historical consciousness and the new self-conscious reflection arising from it combine with a claim that we cannot renounce: namely, the fact that everything we see stands there before us and addresses us directly as if it showed us ourselves. (1986, p. 11)

Here Gadamer grants the legitimacy of our new self-conscious reflection, even if he then accuses it of attempting to renounce its other half. But what is the true relation of these two halves? The substance that intervenes (written tradition) between us and ourselves can 'address' us, but it can't harbor feelings, know the harm it has caused, suffer a terrible loss, treasure a moment, witness life; in other words, it doesn't experience. These are not two beings speaking to each other, as the anthropomorphic conceit suggests; they are two very different parts of a whole. True enough, subjective experience is just one element of the circuitry of human-being-inthe-world along with family, citizenry, history—something inbetween and across all these. And I certainly join Gadamer's effort to move beyond Dilthey's consuming fixation on the interiority of consciousness and the inner mental life, as well as its primacy in the structure of understanding. To read Dilthey is to understand the vehemence of Gadamer's antipathy to the 19<sup>th</sup> century mentalist excess. Nevertheless, the anchorage of experience in the life of the senses of individuals has to be theorized. The Greeks may not have had language for subjectivity and selfhood, but they valued the preciousness of individual life, reflected deeply on its loss, and did explore its domain deeply, searchingly, and revealingly. What is missing on the one side is a certain breadth and persistence, on the other side, well, subjectivity.

As Schleiermacher scholars have been at pains to point out, Schleiemacher placed this difference at the heart of his hermeneutics—the impotence of structure alone and the limit-condition of the biological organism became the dialectical partners in his ethical theory. He asserted axiomatically that we are so constituted that what we experience is in the first place private, and it is that which creates the need to communicate: "The essence of sociability is the recognition that there is something ultimately inaccessible between us even as we try to communicate with each other about it" (p. 265). His ethics is built on the logic of this non-transferability (*Unübertragbarkeit*): "Human sociability is the moral relation of individuals to each other precisely because of all they cannot share, or to put it another way, our profound isolation from each other is what binds us together" (p. 264). We are this constitutional paradox, "the interdependence of non-transferability and relatedness" [das gegenseitige Bedingtsein der Unübertragbarkeit und der Zusammengehörigkeit durch einander] (p. 264).

The most eloquent testimony in contemporary discourse for what Schleiermacher called non-transferability is how Merleau-Ponty writes about human embodiment. Thinking, he writes,

must return to the "there is" which precedes it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and humanly modified world such as it is in our lives and for our bodies—not that possible body which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but this actual body I call mine, this sentinel standing quietly at the command of my words and my acts. Further, *associated bodies* must be revived along with my body—"others," not merely as my congeners, as the zoologist says, but others who haunt me and whom I haunt; "others' along with whom I haunt a single, presence, and actual Being. (1993, pp. 122–123)

Our social relatedness and our biological isolation are co-related. Language and communication are not fully explained by that intractable tension, but they cannot be understood without it.

What this reciprocity of biological distance and social belonging would mean, if we were to put it in Gadamer's chosen terms, is that hermeneutics cannot exchange *Erfahrung* for *Erlebnis*; they are constitutionally interdependent. *Erfahrung* is the recognition and perpetuation in some manner of what has gone before, but it too cannot live if it is not take up and reanimated. Being *beyond* the last syllable of recorded time is in all likelihood the far, far greater

length of time in which recognition will be utterly lost, and no text or language can save us from that loss. That we are all both inescapably social animals and private islands of feeling is a great part of the pathos of the human condition—We try to overcome our irreducible subjectivity with elaborate devices and techniques, technologies, expressive forms, and cultural practices. But even as we try to escape the prison house of our physiological boundaries, we rely on our sensed experience—it is an irreplaceable source of and medium for the richness of our feeling-understanding-being.

#### 6. Conclusions

So, I answer the question of my title<sup>3</sup>: Language does not experience, texts do not experience, history does not experience, tradition does not experience—my child does, I do, my neighbor does. There are deep wells of personal experience resident in the structure of understanding; I don't think we escape the fact that we are each a sensitive resonance chamber, and for a while that becomes a home for our being-in-the-world. We should accept Gadamer's anti-subjectivist correction as an overdue correction, but it was an overcorrection, and we need to recoup a bit of the hermeneutic real estate that will help us include that bit. Subjectivity, or whatever you want to call it, is an intractable aspect of a species that's destined to shuffle back and forth between sense organism and social imagination, and that, by an accident of evolution, learns some of its deepest lessons in the region of selfhood. Before modernism atrophied into decadence and commodified self-gratification, it had the chance to struggle with our dialectical nature honestly. And that struggle seems to me still to be a part of the hermeneutic task.

I want to be clear that we can't simply jump back to the earlier starting point. Although the inclination to move beyond subjectivity has coursed along through Western culture in many subterranean channels, Hegel marked the emphatic rupture with the domination of the contraction of the contraction

<sup>3</sup> My title refers to Gadamer's assertion that tradition speaks to us as a Thou in *Truth and Method* (1994, pp. 358–361).

nant subjectivist-individualist orientation, and catalyzed a cultural movement to retrain our outlook and sensibilities in this other direction – to get the "I" to drop out of the center of our worldview. To this end, Hegel fashioned a new way of speaking—one of the more disorienting things in reading him is that you're never quite certain who the agent of consciousness is, even though it remains unrelentingly active as a force for the work of reason in the world. Indeed this is the whole point of such a processive ontological agency—that it doesn't reside in any fixed or sovereign location, but circulates and diffuses throughout; and so the discursive habit of ghosting the first personal singular, however vertiginous to our ears, is a kind of training against the parochial bias of modern Western subjectivity. Gadamer gives us a more comfortably vernacular way to do this, but in the process obscures somewhat the ontology in view. If we follow his hermeneutic lead, I wish only that we keep an accounting of our loss and gain.

A properly hermeneutic ontology that corrects for Gadamer's over-correction, I will say, would pick up from where Schleiermacher left off when he diagnosed "the constitutive 'defect' of the inwardness of the subject" and sought for its "missing unity" as an incorrigible Endlichkeitsbewußtsein (Frank, 1977, pp. 119, 115). From the dialectical lens of individual personhood and communicative engagement, Schleiermacher was able to acknowledge, thematize, and develop the limitations and prerogatives of subjectivity, rather than having to escape or bury it. He then tried to close the gap between the fullness of our occasional felt solidarities glimpse and our biologically-constituted isolation (our "defective unity") by crediting the daily reciprocities that point in the direction of a whole (p. 120). I think we have to be even more modest than that. If we were to combine the opposing interpretations of Greek culture—the muting of subjectivity that Stenzel explicated and the stirrings of individualism that Bruno Snell celebrated—we would arrive at a truer sense of the conflictual being-in-the-world that Hegel dramatized in the battle-of-principles between Creon and Antigone. A properly hermeneutic identity, I am arguing, provides no resolution to the problem of finitude, neither in an *Erlebnis*, a communal *esprit de corps*, nor the revelation of a text. This is not a recipe for cynicism, but rather a recognition that the metaphor of the neatly fitting dovetail that Gadamer invokes should be replaced by the motley patch-quilt, which refuses the illusory consolations (religious, archetypal, historical, aesthetic, textual, etc.) that could satisfy our immortal longings. This option grants the extraordinary capacities humans have to conceive the fulfillment to which their partial solidarities witness. This tragic knowledge yields a hermeneutic identity that fails to deliver a consummation devoutly to be wished, but grants us a testimonial role in the universe, which is no small thing.

The hermeneutic plea to be radically open to the other, to search out the strength of one's opponent's arguments, to be always on guard against the bias of one's own limited perspective, everything that makes up the cultivated ethos of a hermeneutic sensibility is why I associate myself with philosophical hermeneutics in the first place. I am a tireless exponent of a dialogic comportment, the sociality of reason, and the obligation to seek points of agreement where they can be found in a world riven by factions, self-delusion, and animosity. My scruple has to do with what I regard as the natural corollary to this ethos—the preciousness of every life, its exquisite capacity to experience, the reflective sensitivity granted to each of us to know what it means to have a life. I worry that Gadamer's depreciation of the "self-awareness of the individual" as a "flickering circuit in the closed circuits of historical life" ignores too much this part of the equation, and I want to know if that's true, and why (1994, p. 276).

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# CAPÍTULO II / CHAPTER II THE HERMENEUTIC PRIORITY OF WHICH KIND OF QUESTION? A SPEECH ACT PROPOSAL FOR INTERLOCUTIONARY ACTS\*

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### RESUMEN

Un axioma de la hermenéutica filosófica es que el preguntar posee prioridad hermenéutica. Sin embargo, existen diversos tipos de preguntas. ¿Qué clase de prioridad tiene en la comprensión de pensamientos completos y en la consecución de una fusión de horizontes? La teoría de los actos de habla constituye un recurso para determinar qué tipo y ofrecer así una respuesta. En primer lugar, desarrollo la noción amplia del preguntar en la hermenéutica filosófica. En segundo lugar, examino aspectos de las taxonomías

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de preguntas en la pedagogía así como sus limitaciones. En tercer lugar, me dirijo al enfoque de los Actos de Habla sobre el preguntar y presento un desafío a esta teoría para abordar adecuadamente qué tipo prioridad hermenéutica tiene la formulación de preguntas. Propongo la categoría de "suspensivos" como el tipo de acto interlocutorio definitivo para las preguntas que tienen prioridad hermenéutica.

Palabras clave: Gadamer, prioridad hermenéutica, actos ilocucionarios, pedagogía, cuestionar, teoría de los actos de habla, condiciones de sinceridad, Ricoeur.

### **ABSTRACT**

An axiom of philosophical hermeneutics is that questioning has hermeneutic priority. Yet there are many different kinds of questions. Which sort has priority in understanding complete thoughts and for bringing about a fusion of horizons? Speech act theory is one resource for specifying which kind. I first develop the broad notion of questioning in philosophical hermeneutics. Second, I examine aspects of question taxonomies in pedagogy as well as their shortcomings. Third, I turn to the Speech Act approach to questioning and provide a challenge to this theory for adequately addressing what kind takes hermeneutic priority. I propose the category of "suspensives" as the kind of interlocutionary act definitive for questions that have hermeneutic priority.

**Keywords:** Gadamer, hermeneutic priority, illocutionary acts, pedagogy, questioning, speech act theory, sincerity conditions, Ricoeur.

#### 1. Introduction

While dogs and gods can bark orders, questioning—as least interrogative statements articulated in particular languages—is a uniquely human activity. In the last ten years, the Agency for

Healthcare and Research Quality issued a campaign to encourage patients to ask more questions of their health care providers with the refrain, "Questions are the answer." Moreover, most pedagogical theory focuses on getting students to ask more questions, suggesting that they need to ask questions in order to learn. We have a general sense that questions are important all around. I want to focus on one peculiar aspect of questioning in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

An axiom of philosophical hermeneutics is that to understand a question is to ask it; to understand a complete thought is to understand it as an answer to a question (Gadamer, 2013, p. 383; see also Dickman, 2018, and 2023). That is, questioning has hermeneutic priority. Yet we know from reading pedagogy and curriculum design—let alone interrogation manuals, theory in clinical therapy, and more—that there are many different kinds of questions (see Morgan and Saxton, 2006; Wiggins and Mc-Tighe, 2005; Graesser and Person, 1994; and Dillon, 1978). The open question for Gadamer is: what specific sort of question has priority in understanding complete thoughts? Speech act theory seems to be one resource for clarifying and specifying this topic. In what follows, I first develop the broad notion of questioning in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Second, I examine aspects of question taxonomies in pedagogy. Third, I turn to the speech act approach to questioning and challenge its ability to adequately address what kind takes hermeneutic priority. I propose the category of "suspensives," rooted in Gadamer's thought, to capture the kind of interlocutionary act definitive for questions that have hermeneutic priority.

### 2. Questioning has hermeneutic priority

In this section, I develop the analysis of questioning within philosophical hermeneutics. As Gadamer writes, "The close relation between questioning and understanding is what gives the hermeneutic experience its true dimension" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 383). Hermeneutic experience happens when we become conscious of

the need for interpretation, the need to come to an understanding about something. Gadamer believes that the experience correlates to the essence and structure of questions, and it is this structure that has hermeneutic priority. That is, we can only come to understand a complete thought about something if and only if it answers to a question that we are *actually* asking. In general, questions indicate a readiness for understanding meanings or complete thoughts. They situate other units of discourse and experience. They allow for the transference of complete thoughts from one person's understanding to another person's understanding. These elements of the structure of questioning give it its hermeneutic priority. As Gadamer writes, "The priority of the question in all knowledge and discourse ... really reveals something of an object" (2013, p. 371).

Without questioning, we cannot even have an experience worthy of the name "experience" (see Gadamer, 2013, p. 364). In this way, questions are coextensive with genuine experience because they indicate that our presumptions of understanding have been disrupted. Public opinion suppresses questioning, and prejudices sediment into stereotypes. These are threats to questioning, policing people who ask questions by labeling them "gadflies" or troublemakers. Such sedimentation inhibits understanding rather than facilitating it. Illegitimate or unproductive prejudices do not admit of revision, distracting us from seeing the subject matter at issue or preventing us from really hearing what another person has to say about it (see Warnke, 1997). Because, as Gadamer writes, "the tyranny of hidden prejudices... makes us deaf," understanding requires the critique of arbitrary projection of prejudices or, literally, prejudgments by making them explicit and articulate (Gadamer, 2013, p. 282).

To put a prejudice at risk of criticism requires bringing it into the foreground by articulating it and making it explicit. Only in this way can we suspend the hold a prejudice has on us (see Gadamer, 2013, p. 310). What other people say can thwart our expectations and anticipations of meanings. It is in our acts of questioning, though, where we open ourselves to such an experience. As Gadamer writes, "All suspension of judgments and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of question" (2013, p. 310). Questions suspend prejudices—literally, prejudgments—because they hold subject and predicates of complete thoughts in abeyance (Dickman, 2018, p. 236). Consider, for example, the question, "What year is it?" When we take into account possible years in the secularized era-dating system or even take into account various era-dating systems local to different religious traditions, we can see that the question expresses a suspension of the synthesis between the sentential subject ("this year") and the radiation of predicative possibilities ("is 2025 CE" or "is 1446 AH" or etc.).

The act of questioning, then, breaks open the subject matter through this separation, yet it simultaneously suggests subjects with predicative possibilities. As Gadamer writes, "Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question" (2013, p. 371). The "breaking" and subsequent openness results from suspending the connection or copulation between subject and predicate, while simultaneously suggesting a set of possible alternative connections. In this way, our questions bring a subject matter into a state of indeterminacy. In a sincere or genuine question, the subject matter is elevated into this indeterminacy where there is a fluidity and even equilibrium between this or that alternative. As Gadamer emphasizes, acts of questioning do not posit possibilities, but test them (2013, p. 383). Is this suggested predicate fitting for the sentential subject? Or, is that alternative predicate more fitting? Return to consider the example question above. We might be tempted, in a context of Christian global hegemony (however secularized it might be in appearance), to assume that "2025 CE" is the correct predicate. However, in Muslim communities at least, it is fitting to predicate of "this year" that it "is 1446 AH."

While it is important to acknowledge that questions are acts we can choose to perform, we also need to acknowledge they are events that happen to us. As interrogative speech acts, they are things we can do with words. Yet questions also strike us like a sudden idea and in this way questions are also a passion or suffering (in the sense of something we undergo) rather than simply acts we perform. Gadamer emphasizes that it is not so much that we raise questions as much as questions arise and occur to us (2013, p. 375). This passivity, or in Levinas's terms, this "nonintentionality" of questions grants them potency (see Levinas, 1998). To experience the questionability of something, to have a question press itself upon us, is to be already questioning. As Merleau-Ponty explains the nature of our dehiscent embodiment, our fundamental awareness is itself interrogative (1968, p. 121). As Gadamer elaborates, "There is no tentative or potential attitude of questioning" (2013, p. 383). Even just considering a question is to be already asking it. Once a question occurs to us, it is difficult to free ourselves from its grip. As a form of nonintentional consciousness, questioning further indicates a readiness for understanding meanings, and this provides a clue to the way questions situate other units of discourse.

Building on Gadamer, Ricoeur explains that questioning is constitutive of all meaningful or understandable discourse, where every act of speaking implies "a kind of question" (1976, p. 14). Once we turn to categories in speech act theory, we will clarify that this means questions are categorized properly as "interlocutionary." It is another way of developing the fundamental hermeneutic axiom. Recall that Gadamer presents the axiom as: "To understand a question is to ask it, but to understand a complete thought is to understand it as an answer to a question." On the one hand, a question does not convey a meaning or a complete thought to be understood. The asking of a question is the understanding of the question. This is why just considering a question is to be asking it already although we might not express our question out of being polite or due to other social niceties. On the other hand, a question forms the determinate horizon within which a particular complete thought can be grasped and understood. If a person just makes a statement—in seemingly semantic and hermeneutic outer-space—it seems to make no sense and come out of nowhere. That is, the purported meaning comes off as unintelligible. Without our own asking of the question to which it responds, the statement is lost on us. It is like reading a page of a book but realizing by the end that one does not grasp what they have just read (see Dickman, 2023).

All meaning is mediated linguistically and understanding meaning is linguistic all the way down. This is so because the medium of human experience and thought is structured by "linguisticality." The declarative sentence is the unit of discourse often taken as basic. Such a sentence, at the bare minimum, must consist of both a subject and a predicate, corresponding to the human activities of perceiving and thinking. Consider the sentence, for example, "This is a book." In this case, the grammatical subject, 'this,' designates the experience and perception of the unity of such and such textures, weight, hardness, etc. The predicate, 'book,' designates the unitary thought or concept determined by the definition referred to by the term. The copula, 'is,' conjoins the subject and the predicate. The sentence as the conjunction and disjunction of subject and predicate expresses the conjunction and disjunction of perception (experience) and conception (thought). The copula designates the being to be understood, the correlate of understanding. In this way, a sentence is a meaning or complete thought to be understood (see Ricoeur, 1976, p. 10; Klemm, 1983, pp. 10-12). Given Gadamer's advocacy for the hermeneutic priority of questioning, however, this is only part of the picture, a picture that makes us overlook the role of questioning.

The isolated declarative sentence is not the basic structure of meaningful language. A sentence is meaningful if and only if it is an answer to a real, that is, asked question. What is more fundamental for understanding a statement than the connection between subject and predicate is the question to which it is an answer. As Gadamer writes, "[O]ne speaks with motivation, and *does not just make a statement* but answers a question" (2007, p. 104; my emphasis). With regard to the above example, the apparent question that the sentence answers is "What is this?" In

such a case, the sentence yields meaning according to the map laid out above. However, the actual—though implicit—question it answers is "What sentence might function to help bring out the structure of the basic unit of language called a 'declarative sentence'?" What makes the sentence meaningful in this case is not merely that it binds subject and predicate together and thereby yields a complete thought or meaning to be understood, but that it also fulfills the question to some lesser or greater degree. Identifying this question is what helps us distinguish the mere example or illustration from the actual assertion. Without questions, contextless sentences do not make sense. For Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, the basic unit of language is not merely the sentence, but always the question and answer complex within which any particular sentence yields meanings.

It is crucial to isolate the semantic priority of questions so that we can appreciate their operation in the transferal of complete thoughts from one person to another person, a further way in which questions have hermeneutic priority. Let us return to the axiom that "To understand a question is to ask it." The same cannot be said for meanings or complete thoughts. While we can understand alternative possibilities of meaning, that does not imply we ourselves "mean" or intend any of those possible meanings. When we understand a question another person asks, we then also ask it with them. It is precisely through this sharing of questions that possible alternative complete thoughts are transferred to one's own thinking (Dickman, 2018, p. 231).

By stressing that meanings or complete thoughts are understandable only within question-and-answer complexes, we can see that complete thoughts really are situated within the life of dialogue. Dialogue just is the sustained movement of question-and-answer complexes (see Dickman, 2021, ch. 7). Dialogue is distinct from merely acquiring knowledge. I can gain a bit of knowledge through the use of a question like "What year is it?" But if that question leads to an exchange with another person where I come to know them better, or fuse horizons with them, that is a genui-

ne dialogue. Whether written or spoken, utterances do not yield understandable meanings outside the intersubjective situation of questioners and answerers. This is why Ricoeur labels questions as a unique kind of speech act, the "interlocutionary" acts, because "questioning and answering sustain the movement and dynamic of speaking" (1976, p. 14).

If questions were a mere means of acquiring information as "epistemic imperatives," if they were such that they achieved their ultimate fulfillment in being answered definitely, then sustained dialogue would be impossible (see Aqvist, 1965). If I want to know someone's name, I can look at their nametag just as easily as I can ask them what it is. Does questioning have to consist of consciousness seeking fulfillment in knowledge? Levinas writes, "Must we not admit, on the contrary, that the request and the prayer that cannot be dissimulated in the question attest to a relation to the other person...? A relation delineated in the question, not just as any modality, but as in its originary one" (Levinas, 1998, p. 72; my emphasis). True, there are such questions that dissolve in being answered definitively, and these are "closed" questions or typical interrogative statements, such as "Where are my car keys?" These questions do not facilitate dialogue. Other questions, however, cannot be resolved definitively. This is not a mere trivial observation of the fact that, for instance, we will never know what Plato had for breakfast on his fortieth birthday—were we actually motivated to find this out, which is doubtful.

The important questions here are the "big questions," such as those concerning the meaning of life. Every age, culture, and thinker struggles with such perennial questions. Similar to such perennial questions, but oriented toward more modest matters, are those "open questions" that admit of multiple perspectives, such as "Are 'good reads' good books?" (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, p. 30). These questions, like the perennial ones, are achievements of and for thinking, not mere problems to be solved or dissolved. Genuinely open questions are achievements because they suspend a space in which we are afforded the opportunity to con-

sider a multiplicity of meanings alongside one another, all of which count as an answer but none of which settle the matter definitively or authoritatively.

As we have seen, questions have hermeneutic priority in three basic ways: psychically, semantically, and interpersonally. Yet Gadamer does not sufficiently distinguish between kinds of questions. Early in his analysis of the hermeneutic priority of the question, Gadamer briefly distinguishes between roughly four kinds of questions in order to show that only one of these kinds truly counts as a genuine question. For Gadamer, whereas pedagogical questions have no questioner, rhetorical questions have neither a questioner nor an object in question (2013, p. 372). Moreover, "slanted questions"—or what we may be more familiar with as "loaded questions"—are matters that have already been decided, and so are not really questions (Gadamer, 2013, p. 372). These three—the pedagogical, the rhetorical, and the slanted question—are, for Gadamer, not real questions. Only "real" questions count as having hermeneutic priority.

We all know that there is a multitude of kinds of real questions. Which of these have hermeneutic priority? Or do they all amount to the same thing in the field of understanding? A brief excursus through pedagogical reflection shows that, no, not all questions are the same. Some questions indicate superior comprehension of and insight about a subject matter.

### 3. A surplus of question taxonomies in pedagogy

Developments in reading pedagogy and curriculum design survey numerous kinds of questions, many of which appear to sufficiently measure up to Gadamer's ideal. While there is a surplus of pedagogical manuals categorizing kinds of questions useful for eliciting different qualities of student thinking, Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives forms the basis upon which many educators classify questions (see Bloom and Krathwohl, 1965; Nilson, 2003, pp. 114-115). Bloom divides and arranges thinking skills in a hierarchical order from memory and application to synthesis and evaluation. The assumption is that specific kinds of questions correspond to, and thus are capable of eliciting, these different levels of thinking skills. For example, McKeachie—in his popular text for college and university instructors—delineates seven levels of questioning purported to stimulate classroom discussion and formulating student assessments (2002, pp. 34-36). "Factual" questions, for instance, are said to check student background knowledge or memory. "Application" and "interpretation" questions are said to require students to identify the significance of course materials for things beyond the classroom. "Causal" and "comparison" questions are said to help students recognize relationships in the materials. "Evaluative" and "critical" questions are said to require of students that they make judgments and that they challenge their own assumptions.

In her alternative text on college instruction based in research, Nilson posits a definition of "well-constructed questions" as those that have "multiple respectable answers" (Nilson, 2003, p. 115). These questions, she thinks, encourage broad participation, require in-depth treatment, and spark debate. In addition to McKeachie's (2002) set of questions, Nilson also cites a number of other kinds of questions developed by Andrews in his manual for teaching assistants at UC San Diego (2003, p. 116). Described as "high mileage" types of questions, these include brainstorm questions (such as "How might the public be made to care about ecological imbalances?"), focal questions (such as "To what extent is Ivan Illich a victim of his own decisions or society?"), and playground questions (such as "What underlying assumptions about human nature must this theorist have?"). Nilson contrasts these with poorly constructed questions, such as those that require a programmed answer, the "dead end" yes-or-no question, and egostroking questions.

A pattern emerges in all of this. The variety of classroom questions are often reduced to two basic kinds of questions: those requiring lower-order thinking skills and those requiring higher-order thinking skills. As Cotton defines them,

Lower cognitive questions are those which ask the student merely to recall...[and] are also referred to in the literature as fact, closed, recall, and knowledge questions. Higher cognitive questions are defined as those which ask the student to mentally manipulate bits of information previously learned to create an answer or to support an answer with logically reasoned evidence...[and] are also called openended, interpretive, evaluative, inquiry, inferential, and synthesis questions (1988, III.B.3).

Because higher-order thinking skills are target learning-outcomes of standards-based education reform, most state and district standards emphasize and promote questions that are assumed to evoke higher order thinking. The handbook issued by the International Center for Leadership in Education (2001-2006), for example, prescribes higher-order questions because they supposedly have a greater potential to create learning conversations. Higher-order questions are seen as a powerful tool for teachers in that they ideally help teachers to develop student interest and motivate them to get actively involved, to cultivate critical thinking skills and inquiring attitudes in students, to nurture student insights by exposing relationships, and to stimulate independent pursuit of knowledge in students. It seems that something as simple as a mere question is capable of doing amazing things!

This brief excursus into classroom question taxonomies allows us to ask of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, "Which kind of question has hermeneutic priority?" While we might be tempted to claim that Gadamer has "higher-order" questions in mind, we ought to resist this because research on the effects of questions in the classroom is ambiguous at best (see Dillon 1978). As I have examined elsewhere, "higher-order" questions are a mantra or even a myth in pedagogy (Dickman, 2009). While "higher-order" thinking skills are key in standards based educational reform, empirical studies of purportedly "higher-order" questions show that student responses are no more extensive to them than their responses are to closed questions (Fisher, 2005; and Myhill and Dunkin, 2005). In broader terms, there is a growing coalition of scholarship expos-

ing how Bloom's taxonomy itself—if framed in terms of a hierarchy—is problematic. How is synthesis superior to comprehension? Is not the combination of a subject and a predicate itself already a "synthesis"? How can understanding not also include evaluation and application? This taxonomy is not necessarily helpful because the categories are artificial and expedient rather than grounded ontologically. Ordinary language philosophy, particularly speech act theory, might help us clarify the essence of questions in order to determine what kind of question best captures that essence.

### 4. Speech act theory characterizes questions as "directives"

Ricoeur warrants this turn to ordinary language philosophy in order to clarify what it is to question. While this philosophy does not have the "final word," it is, Ricoeur thinks, "a necessary first stage in philosophical inquiry" (2008, p. 380). Allow me to briefly rehearse some of the basics of Austin's theory and others' development of it before turning to questions in particular. Austin distinguishes between three basic kinds of speech acts: propositional (or locutionary), perlocutionary, and illocutionary (Austin, 1976, pp. 98-102; see also Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch 1980). Perlocutionary speech acts are those dimensions of speech acts in which speakers attempt (often unsuccessfully) to affect a listener in a way that goes beyond the listener's propositional understanding of what is said (see Rosemont, 1970; Dickman, 2020). Illocutionary speech acts are the various forces that propositional acts carry; that is, illocution is what speakers intend to do in and with what is said.

While perlocutionary acts are important for a comprehensive study of language use, speech act theorists focus predominantly on illocutionary acts. Contra Wittgenstein's purported claim that there are an "infinite" number of language-games (2009, §23), some analytic disciples of Austin claim that there are five basic things speakers can do with language: assert, direct, commit, express, and declare. As one writes,

There are five general ways of using language, five general categories of illocutionary acts. We tell people how things are (Assertives), we try to get people to do things (Directives), we commit ourselves to doing things (Commissives), we express our feelings and attitudes (Expressives), and we bring about changes in the world through our utterances (Declarations) (Searle, 1979, p. viii).

Assertives are propositions that entail our commitment to the truth of that which we say. That is, we claim something with them. Directives are attempts to get a listener to do something, as in uttering a command or a plea. Commissives are those utterances whereby we commit ourselves to future action, such as with a promise. Expressives articulate feelings or psychological states as they relate to the rest of the content of what is said, such as saying "Ouch!"Through declarations, we attempt to bring about new states of affairs through our words—it is in the declarative genus that Austin's classic example of "I now pronounce you 'married'" in a wedding has its place.

These illocutionary categories are based on varying coordination of four universal "felicity" conditions: the propositional, preparatory, sincerity, and essential rules (1979, pp. 2-8; see also Searle 1969, pp. 66-67). The essential condition, or rule, of a speech act is governed partially by the "direction of fit" or the way the act relates the words to the world. For instance, when we assert something, we attempt to get our words to "fit" the world accurately (Searle, 1969, p. 60). In promises, however, we try to get the world to fit our words via the effort to make our actions match what we promise to do. Another crucial feature of the essential rule is the point of the utterance. For example, the point of a command is to get the listener to do something. The sincerity rule concerns the attitude accompanying the utterance. As examples, asserting something implies we believe it and committing to do something implies we will do it. The preparatory rules concern the statuses and the interests of the interlocutors with regard to one another. A parent, for instance, might direct a child to do something and it is likely in the interest of the child to do so. The

propositional rule constrains the content of an utterance. A difference between a statement of regret and a statement of hope, for instance, involves the fact that typically the former concerns the past whereas the latter concerns the future. The production of a speech act, such as a question, is governed by these constitutive rules and they allow us to recognize whether an utterance is the realization of a particular illocutionary act.

Questions, for speech act theorists, belong squarely within the class of directives as requests for the performance of speech acts in which the form of proper response is prescribed already by the question (see Searle, 1992, p. 8; see also Bell, 1975, p. 206). As one theorist writes, "Questions are a subclass of directives, since they are attempts by [the speaker] to get [the hearer] to answer, i.e., to perform a speech act" (Searle, 1979, p. 14). The point of a question is to get another person to speak within the constraints set out by the question. In this way, questions are how speakers attempt to "get the world to match the words." With them, speakers attempt to get another person to do something, namely, answer.

Other speech act theorists, such as Bell, help clarify the relation between questions and directives, and elaborate on this as an advance beyond erotetic logic. The formal logical character of questions is not about syntactical or other grammatical conventions since the "same" question can be asked in different ways and in different languages. All questions, in the erotetic framework, contain presuppositions or presupposed propositions, and the only way a question can have a "true" answer is if the presuppositions are true. For example, the question "Is it raining?" presupposes the proposition that "Either it is raining or it is not raining." This proposition must be true for either answer to be true (Bell, 1975, p. 198). Questions with false or narrow presuppositions can be corrected by either rejecting the presuppositions or fleshing the question out to incorporate more potential answers. For example, "Have you stopped beating your dog?" might be rejected as a loaded question by simply pointing out you have never had a dog. The point is, nevertheless, questions—from the approach of erotetic logic—just are (disjunctive) sets of propositions from which answerers must select or answerers must change the topic in some way. So the question of whether it is raining could be rephrased without loss of meaning in the following way. "Select one: It is raining. It is not raining."

This overlooks the performative force with which questions are given and taken. As Bell explains, questions also make requests about selection from the presupposed propositions (Bell, 1975, p. 196). They could be expressed with urgency or indifference to how fast the answerer provides their answer. The question "Did you earn a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree?" requests that selection be made between two alternatives, and the request disallows "neither" as an answer-though of course that could be used to reject the question. This has led many theorists to locate interrogatives as a species of imperatives, or in other words, as a species of directives. The theory labels questions as "epistemic imperatives" (see Aqvist, 1965). The illustrative cases of questions used here as paradigmatic for all questions in general are those instances in which: a) the questioner does not know the answer and, in asking the question, b) expresses the knowledge the questioner does have about the subject matter. For such standard cases, we are to transform questions into the form "Make it the case that I know X." For example, take the question "Which US Presidents were generals?" This is to be transposed into "For each X where X is a President and a general, 'make me know' that X was a President and a general" (Harrah, 1982, pp. 26-27). The response to the question only counts as an answer if the request is satisfied in that the questioner comes to know which presupposition is true. We can extend so-called standard cases like this to, say, classroom contexts where teachers already know the answer. The formal structure can be modified to something like, "Make me know that you know X." This is just what exams do because presumably teachers are not going to ask students questions to which the teachers do not know the answer!

Beyond the construal of questions as imperatives in terms of their formal or logical content, questions are also classed regularly as directives or commands in terms of their illocutionary or performative force. Not only do questions appear to state imperatives, they also seem to perform like imperatives. The point of a question, what questions do, is to prompt another person to speak within the constraints set out by the question. This is in part due to the flexibility of the verb "to ask." Asking someone to tell you where they are from ("Where are you from?") is a polite form of the imperative mood but an imperative nonetheless ("Tell me where you are from."). For example, we can render the question "What is your name?" into the explicit command "Tell me your name" or even the more rigorously discrete "Select one from the following: Your name is Muhammad. Your name is Ruth. Your name is... [ad infinitum]." Simply because a question can be rendered into a command does not mean it is insincere, though. In this speech act approach to questions, there are key "felicity" or sincerity conditions that must be met: the questioner does not know the answer, the questioner wants to know it, and the questioner uses the utterance to attempt to get the answer from a source (Searle, 1969, p. 60). Thus, this command counts as a sincere question. My point here is that most questions in our day-to-day lives are sincere questions whether they are expressed in the interrogative mood as a question or in the imperative mood as a command.

To elaborate more, there are four specific conditions that must be met for a question to be expressed successfully (Searle, 1969, pp. 66-67). First, there are no limits set to a question's propositional content, as distinct from, say, commissives, which must always be about something in the future. Second, the preparatory condition requires that a questioner must not know the answer and not believe that the other person will provide it without being asked the question. Third, to meet the sincerity condition, the questioner must want the requested information. Fourth, to meet the essential condition, the questioner must attempt to get the information via the utterance rather than some other way (see Stenstrom, 1984).

Based on the condition of propositional content, Searle distinguishes two different kinds of questions corresponding to the traditional grammatical distinction between "closed" and "open" questions or even the purportedly "lower" order and "higher" order questions in pedagogy (Searle, 1979, p. 31; see Kearsley, 1976, p. 358). "Closed" questions are typically yes-no questions, questions that can be answered either in the affirmative or in the negative. They ask for the confirmation or denial of a complete proposition. "Open" questions, however, are wh-questions, or incomplete propositions requiring the answer to determine the interrogative pronoun. For example, the question, "What is your name?" requests the determination of the interrogative word "what." Another way of articulating the question is: "Your name is \_\_\_\_\_. Please fill in the blank." Open questions like this one, as we can see, are essentially the attempt to complete incomplete propositions (see Goody, 1978, p. 23). As long as this command or epistemic imperative meets all four conditions, then this command counts as a question. In sum, the point of a question is to get words to match the world by way of another person's answering the question.

I think we should be worried here. Are there any questions that cannot be reduced to directives? Why do we have "questions" when we can get by with soft imperatives like requesting things? Piazza (2001) raises this concern in developing a notion of "conducive" questions, as some questions lead the answerer to the questioner's preferred answer. These can be performed in a number of ways, such as the incredulous form ("You seriously believe that [x]?") or in the form of conjuring an impossible reality ("Do criminal justice systems really convict all people who deserve punishment?"). Borge (2007) develops "unwarranted" questions as conducing answerers to "admittures," where no matter what an answerer does, the answerer gives away an implication in light of being cornered by such a question. For example, imagine a student asking a professor, "What were you doing last night?" If the professor resists answering, the implication will seem to be that they were up to something nefarious—that is, they admit to something without even

saying anything! These should help us see that there is a risk that comes with subsuming questions within the directive genus.

An even more significant worry is whether acts of questioning, as disguised commands, are mere oppressive tools. As Comay writes,

Perhaps one day a history will be written of the institutionalized violence lurking behind the apparent guilelessness of the question—its juridical force (the investigation, the interrogation, the cross-examination), its pedagogical power (the disputatio, the quiz, the exam), its religious authority (the inquisition, the catechism), its medical prerogative (the examination, the inquest), its prestige as an instrument of surveillance (the interview, the questionnaire). (1991, p. 149)

If questions just are oppressive tools, perhaps they all can be translated into commands. Žižek illustrates this in the mouths of totalitarians, "It is we who will ask the questions here!" (Žižek, 1989, pp. 178-182 (original emphasis); see also Fiumara, 1990). If all questions, or the paradigmatic versions of questions that purportedly elucidate their logical and illocutionary character, are merely disguised commands, perhaps we might agree with Comay, Žižek, and Fiumara. Perhaps we ought to give up the tactic of questioning wholesale in order to help bring about less oppressive social structures.

I believe this reduction inadequately specifies the unique kind of question that has hermeneutic priority. I propose that we invent an alternative illocutionary category based on Gadamer's and Ricoeur's reflections, what we can call "suspensives."

## 5. Proposing the illocutionary category of "suspensives" for genuine questions that have priority

I consider the speech act theory of questions adequate for what I call "typical interrogative statements" or sincere questions, such as "Where are my car keys?" However, neither kind of question discussed by Bell or others works as the kind of question that has

hermeneutic priority in bringing about a fusion of horizons. They are not the kind of question of which we can say, with Ricoeur, that they are constitutive of discourse. Recall that Ricoeur raises the issue that questions are "interlocutionary" speech acts as a distinct metacategory of speech acts, from the locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary, to the interlocutionary. To preserve their unique performative status, though, I propose naming them "suspensives" within the illocutionary metacategory as well. As an example, consider again the question suggested by Wiggins and McTighe in their groundbreaking text on curriculum design aimed at understanding: "Are 'good reads' good books?" (2005, p. 30). While the point of such a question might seem to be to get another person to answer it, I submit that—preceding the moment of anyone's attempting to answer the question—the question aims at its shared asking. The point of such a question is, in other words, to get our interlocutor to share it, not answer it. And yet, is this a deliberate aspect of the act? My primary point of contestation with speech act theory is focused on the essential condition, or *point*, of a particular question.

Let us recall that one crucial way in which questions have hermeneutic priority is that they allow for the transferal of meaning from one person to another. This can only be realized, however, if both partners in dialogue ask the question. If this is so, then they are not reducible to demands for an answer. Instead of directives, these are "suspensives." To quote Gadamer again, "All suspension of judgments and hence, a fortiori, of [pre-judgments], has the logical structure of a question" (2013, p. 310). As Coltman translates Gadamer: "Such bringing-into-suspension... is the proper and original essence of questioning. Questioning always allows the possibilities of a situation to be seen in suspension" (1998, p. 109). It is not that suspensive questions doubt the truth of a particular judgment, but that they hold all judgments—including prejudices—in suspense, relegating them to possible meanings.

The point of suspensives is neither to make the world match the words, such as with commissives and directives, nor to make the words match the world, such as with assertives. Moreover, they do not merely express an emotional state, nor do they bring about a change in the world as in a declaration. Suspensives are unique in that their point is not, as current speech act theory claims, to get someone to answer but, first and foremost, to get the other person to share our question and in this way uncover possibilities about the subject matter referenced in the utterance. In other words, the point of a suspensive is to make space so that we can come to understand what someone else has to say about something. In this way, they preserve approximations of sincerity and preparatory conditions. In terms of direction of fit, or the essential condition, questions are omnidirectional—it is not about getting words to match the world or the world to match the words, but a suspended wonder of which words and which world. In terms of the accompanying attitude, or the sincerity condition, the questioner does not necessarily need to be ignorant of a bit of information, such as in the example about asking, "What year is it?" A questioner can know it is certainly 2025 CE, yet still be open to fusing horizons with others living within other forms of life. In terms of the relative statuses of interlocutors, or the preparatory condition, suspensives are synergistic rather than hierarchical or asymmetrical. In terms of the content, or propositional condition, as noted the complete thoughts or subject and predicate relations are held in suspense rather than already synthesized possible propositions. This is not to say that all questions are suspensives, but that questions that are suspensives break out of the directive genus.

Suspensive questions invert the normal expressivity of speech, transforming it into receptive speech that leads to dialogue. It is invitational rather than an interrogation. It is not about bringing about knowledge of a fact but instead bringing about understanding between people. As Levinas suggests, the very relationship established within questioning "cannot be reduced to intentionality, or that it rests, properly speaking, on an intentionality that fails" (Levinas 1998, p. 71). The question-answer sequence is too short-lived when it comes to typical interrogatives like "Where are my car keys?" or "What is your name?" As Stenström (1984)

explains, conversations and dialogues are defined by prolonged turn-taking, with multiple sets of question-answer-question sequences. The prolonged dialogue shows that the questioner is actively listening to reach an understanding with another. To put it concretely, and paradoxically, suspensives are a way in which we listen with our mouths. In order to distinguish suspensives from directives sufficiently, let us draw out the connection between this kind of questioning and listening, a connection that Gadamer suggests but leaves underdeveloped.

Gadamer provides warrant for this turn to listening in asserting that "anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness there is no genuine human bond" (2013, p. 369). Gadamer grounds the openness requisite for engaging with another person and which allows us to be conducted by the subject matter in our capacity to listen. Dialogue involves listening because participating in dialogue together means that we are able to listen to what each other has to say. Listening to what someone else has to say does not mean that we slavishly follow it or naively agree with it, however. This can only be explained by the openness provided in questioning where we can consider what another person says as a meaning or complete thought to be understood. That is, we can consider what they say, but we do not have to agree with it.

The point of listening is to stay focused on what another person is saying. By attempting to stay focused on what the other person is saying, we guard against the distractions of our own hang-ups and suspend disabling prejudices. Moreover, as Beatty writes,

To listen to another with openness is... to open the self to the possibility of taking seriously *meanings of the sort that can transform it*. Such openness requires, therefore, not merely the willingness to rework and rethink experience and its ingredient opinions but the willingness to rework character. (1999, p. 295; my emphasis)

Every time we listen to others, in other words, our very selfhood is at stake—to the degree that what we hear and understand might change who we have been and could become.

Listeners are not silent, however. A number of discourse analysts show that listeners indeed speak. Gardner, for instance, labels the speech of listeners "response tokens" (2001, p. 19). Response tokens are usually monosyllabic utterances many English speakers make in order to encourage the speaker to continue (as in saying mm), to acknowledge or take note of what the speaker is saying (as in oh), and to mark a readiness for change in topic (as in okay). We literally speak as we listen, and such speaking displays to the speaker that we are listening.

My proposal is that we need a speech act category that brings questioning and listening together. Speakers use some questions as "response tokens" in order to ensure they are hearing and taking note of what someone else is saying (see Lakoff, 2004, p. 49-51). Listening involves suspending the application of our perspective and interests in order that we might understand what another person is saying. Furthermore, we construct tentative interpretations of what the other person is saying. We test these constructions against what they say, sometimes through asking the other person, "Is this what you mean?" Such questioning practices of active listening displays respect for the other person's authority over their own speech. Asking this kind of question shows that we are listening to what the other person is saying rather than telling him what he is saying or telling him what to do. Suspensives call in into question the very mechanisms of applying our perspective when it is engaged properly. By suspensives, then, I refer to those questions through which speakers invite and listen to the contributions of others in a sustained dialogue by suspending judgments. Sometimes they initiate a dialogue, and, at other times, they occur in the midst of a dialogue.

### 6. Conclusion: Sharing suspensives to realize understanding one another

Suspensives are particularly unique in the way in which we show our understanding of them. We can show that we understand an order by carrying out the action requested in the order. We can show that we understand a claim by consenting to or disagreeing with it. We can show we understand a joke by laughing. But what do we do to show that we understand a question? To reiterate Gadamer's insightful remark, "To understand a question means to ask it" (2013, p. 383). That is, when we are engaged in dialogue with another person and we hear her ask a question, our understanding of that question entails that we ask it with her. Instead of it being my question or your question, it is *our* question! In this way, questions facilitate the transferal of meanings from one person to the other as possible answers to the questions. Suspensives, then, are not aimed primarily at getting answers but at sharing the question. One person's question becomes *our* question and thus makes dialogue possible as the exchange and consideration of multiple meanings. As such, we can conclude by claiming that it is suspensives that have hermeneutic priority.

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### CAPÍTULO III / CHAPTER III

### HERMENEUTIC AMBIGUITIES: LANGUAGE, HISTORICALITY, AND TRUTH\*

Dieter Teichert

### RESUMEN

El núcleo de la hermenéutica filosófica de Gadamer está signado por una concepción altamente sofisticada del lenguaje constituye. Por un lado, el énfasis de Gadamer en las humanidades y el conocimiento histórico está íntimamente conectado con las teorías y tradiciones de la interpretación. La interpretación está tácitamente

<sup>\*</sup> Many thanks to Charles Ducey for correcting my English. The writings of Gadamer are cited from the 10-volume edition of Gesammelte Werke = 'GW'. References indicate the respective volume of this edition. Citations of Wahrheit und Methode (= GW 1) are given in the German original and the English translation: Gadamer (2004) = TM. Heidegger's 'Sein und Zeit' (= SZ) is used in the Niemeyer edition, Tübingen 2006. Citations of SZ are in German and English: Heidegger (2001) = BT. The achievements of the translators of Heidegger and Gadamer are admirable, but, of course, with authors such as Heidegger and Gadamer the original texts are indispensable.

presente en la comunicación cotidiana y se vuelve explícita en las disciplinas filológicas e históricas donde se discuten cuestiones epistemológicas y metodológicas de validez y justificación.

Por otro lado, el pensamiento de Gadamer se aparta de tales enfoques sistemáticamente orientados y propugna una visión contrastante y abarcadora. Esta orientación encuentra refugio en el pensamiento de Heidegger y sitúa al lenguaje y la comprensión en un nivel completamente diferente en comparación con las concepciones cognitivas de verdad, significado e interpretación.

¿Por qué Gadamer se distancia de las concepciones cognitivas de la comprensión y la interpretación? La decisión de Gadamer parece estar motivada en gran medida por la intuición de que la lingüística y las filosofías ortodoxas del lenguaje no son capaces de abordar la cuestión filosóficamente fundamental "¿Qué es el lenguaje?" en su sobria generalidad, porque siempre están ya utilizando y presuponiendo el lenguaje, al menos en la forma de un metalenguaje. Por supuesto, todo lenguaje puede ser descrito por un metalenguaje. Esta es la base de las teorías lingüísticas y filosóficas del lenguaje. Sin embargo, en este marco, no existe la posibilidad de ofrecer una explicación no circular del lenguaje. Por lo tanto, Gadamer descarta por completo el proyecto de una teoría del lenguaje sistemáticamente construida y reconoce la necesidad del círculo hermenéutico.

La relación entre lenguaje e historia en Gadamer pone de relieve el hecho de que los lenguajes humanos no son sistemas estables e invariantes, sino medios dinámicos y fluidos de conceptualización y comunicación. Los procesos de modificación, transformación y desarrollo de los lenguajes están intrínsecamente vinculados a las dimensiones culturales, sociales y políticas de la vida humana. Por consiguiente, la historicidad es una dimensión integral del lenguaje. El lenguaje nos proporciona los recursos para formar creencias, deseos e intenciones. Sería una subestimación bastante peligrosa decir que el lenguaje y el mundo de la vida están íntimamente relacionados. No hay mundo de la vida, no hay experiencia independiente del lenguaje y su reservorio de conceptos. A la inversa, no

existe un lenguaje puro, inmune a la experiencia humana y al contacto con el mundo de la vida.

Si bien parece fácil seguir la línea de Gadamer con respecto a las concepciones del lenguaje y la historicidad, la relación entre lenguaje, historicidad y verdad resulta enigmática. Las nociones filosóficas actuales de verdad pueden ser compatibles con el pensamiento de Gadamer, pero para este autor la verdad no opera primariamente en un nivel lógico o epistemológico. De este modo, elimina la distinción entre sentido, significado y verdad.

Palabras clave: hermenéutica, lenguaje, historicidad, verdad, interpretación.

#### **ABSTRACT**

A highly sophisticated conception of language constitutes the core of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. On the one hand, Gadamer's focus on the humanities and historical knowledge is intimately connected with theories and traditions of interpretation. Interpretation is tacitly present in everyday communication and becomes explicit in the philological and historical disciplines where epistemological and methodological questions of validity and justification are discussed.

On the other hand, Gadamer's thinking turns away from such systematically oriented approaches and advocates a contrasting and encompassing view. This orientation takes refuge in Heidegger's thinking and puts language and understanding on a completely different level in comparison to the cognitive conceptions of truth, meaning and interpretation.

Why does Gadamer distance himself from the cognitive conceptions of understanding and interpretation?—Gadamer's move seems to be largely motivated by the insight, that linguistics and orthodox philosophies of language are not capable to tackle the philosophically basic question *What is language?* in its sober generality, because they are always already using and presuppo-

sing language, at least in the form of a metalanguage. Of course, every language can be described by a metalanguage. This is the basis of linguistic and philosophical theories of language. But in this framework, there is no possibility to give a non-circular account of language. Therefore, Gadamer dismisses the project of a systematically constructed theory of language altogether and acknowledges the necessity of the hermeneutical circle.

The relation of language and history in Gadamer highlights the fact that human languages are not stable and invariant systems, but dynamic and fluid media of conceptualization and communication. The processes of modification, transformation and development of languages are intrinsically tied to the cultural, social and political dimensions of human live. Therefore, historicality is an integral dimension of language. Language gives us the resources for forming beliefs, desires and intentions. It would be a rather dangerous understatement to say that language and life-world are intimately related. There is no life-world, there is no experience independent from language and its reservoir of concepts. Conversely, there is no pure language, immune from human experience and contact with the life-world.

Whereas it seems easy to follow Gadamer's lead with respect to the conceptions of language and historicality, the relation of language, historicality, and truth is a riddle. Current philosophical notions of truth may be compatible with Gadamer's thinking, but for Gadamer truth is not primarily operative on a logical or epistemological level. He thereby obliterates the distinction of sense, meaning and truth.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, Language, Historicality, Truth, Interpretation.

### 1. Introduction: From Regional Hermeneutics to General Hermeneutics, From General Hermeneutics to Universal Hermeneutics

The origins of occidental philology are commonly traced to Alexandria, where scholars analysed, commented, and edited the works of Homer and other authors since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE<sup>1</sup>. As is often the case, origins are controversial. Leaving aside the cultures of the Near East, which have developed forms of scholarship as early as in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE (dictionaries of Sumerian language written by Babylonians), the Greek culture had indeed made efforts to explain and comment on Homer's epics and other texts even before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. There were principally two reasons for these activities. Firstly, in the case of Homer, the need for textual explanations was especially urgent, since his archaic language had become unintelligible to a large extent for the Greeks of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Secondly, because handwriting was the only available technique for the reproduction of texts, it became necessary to distinguish between correct and corrupted copies, as mistakes occurred frequently. Against this backdrop, ancient hermeneutics is presented commonly as a technique of allegorical interpretation. This is misleading, because the philological and editorial activities of the Hellenistic scholars covered a large spectrum, and allegorical interpretation constituted only a relatively small part of it<sup>2</sup>.

Nearly all the original texts of the Hellenistic philologists are lost. But a substantial amount of material has survived in what is

Before the Alexandrians, Aristotle had written six books on Homeric problems. His books are lost, but 40 fragments have been preserved. In these fragments, Aristotle proposes solutions to particular textual problems. His main focus is directed at specific problematic words, sentences or passages. General aspects of Homer's poetry are occasionally remarked on but he is nowhere proposing an encompassing interpretation of the two epics. The German translation accompanied by a valuable commentary was published by B. Breitenberger (Aristoteles, 2006, pp. 305–437; cf. Richardson, 1992). Latacz notes: "Aristoteles hat [...] mehr für die Homer-Philologie als ganze und die Homer-Kommentierung im besonderen geleistet, als uns heute in der Regel noch bewußt ist" (2000, pp. 7–8).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Richardson & Montanari 1994; Dickey 2007; Montanari 2020.

known as scholia, that is, explanations and commentaries for teaching. The approach of Hellenistic philology was transposed afterwards into other fields. Various forms of regional hermeneutics were practised by philologists, theologians, historians, lawyers, and philosophers. Specialized techniques of textual critique, commentary, and interpretation were developed. The art of interpretation (ars interretandi) was not a discipline in its own right. It was regarded as a subsidiary competence in the respective fields. Occasionally, general problems of textual meaning were discussed in rhetoric, poetics, logic, and theology. However, there was no such a thing as general hermeneutics<sup>3</sup>. It was not before the 17<sup>th</sup> century that hermeneutics was conceived as a general theory of interpretation. In 1630 Johann Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666), a Lutheran theologian, published his Idea boni interpretis et malitiosi calumniatoris in Argentorati (Strasbourg/France). Dannhauer conceived of hermeneutics as a proper discipline whose task is the analysis of obscurities in any discourse that can be made intelligible<sup>4</sup>. In 1654 he published a book on theological exegesis Hermenevtica Sacra Sive Methodus exponendarum S. Literarum proposita & vindicata<sup>5</sup>. This is regarded as the first occurrence of the term hermeneutica in the title of a book.

Hermeneutics existed nearly exclusively in the form of specialized techniques designed to solve problems for an adequate understanding of specific texts until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is worthwhile to remember that not every written document was taken into consideration. Only authoritative texts with an exceptional standing like the Bible, statutes, edicts, contracts, laws, works of poetry, historical charters, and philosophical classics were the objects of scholarly in-

<sup>3</sup> There is widespread agreement on this point. For Szondi, universal hermeneutics is defined by the conception of understanding proposed by Schleiermacher; cf. Szondi 1975. Glenn W. Most explains the absence of general hermeneutics in Antiquity by referring to the unsystematic character of the rules and reflections; cf. Most 1984 (p. 65).

<sup>4 «</sup> Paucis, omnis oratio foràs prolata quatenus obscura sit sed exponibilis est hujus tracatus objectum.» (Dannhauer, 1630, p. 29).

<sup>5</sup> Dannhauer 1654.

terpretation<sup>6</sup>. Given the diverse genres and institutional functions of the respective texts, the techniques of interpretation were refined by specialists. Single attempts at a general hermeneutic theory were sketched starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. These reflections sometimes transcended the boundaries of the specialized disciplines and discussed general methodological and epistemological questions. But attempts at a more systematic approach were not undertaken before the Enlightenment. In 1742 Johann Martin Chladenius published his 'Einleitung zur richtigen Auslegung vernuenfftiger Reden und Schriften'8 and in 1757 Georg Friedrich Meier's Versuch einer allgemeinen Auslegungskunst<sup>9</sup> appeared in print. The achievements of these works cannot be discussed in detail, but one should note that they were limited insofar as their conception of language was restricted by the subordination of language to rationality. The function of language was the expression of thought. Language was the medium of representation for cognition.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) made a decisive step that was to transform hermeneutics profoundly. His expertise covered philosophy, classical philology, and theology. In his time, he was renowned as a philologist, as a translator of Plato, and as one of the most important Protestant theologians. Schleiermacher repeatedly lectured on hermeneutics<sup>10</sup>, and he wished to develop hermeneutics as a *general* 

<sup>6</sup> There are also innumerable cases of immanent hermeneutics, especially in poetry, where the author adds an interpretation as an integral part of the work; two examples: Dante's exegesis of the canzoni in his 'Convivio' and Giordano Bruno's De gli eroici furori (1585); cf. Moog-Grünewald 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Jaeger 1974, Beetz 1981. During the last decades, scholarship on the history of hermeneutics before the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been intense. It is impossible to give an exhaustive bibliography here. Notable examples are: Alexander 1993; Bühler 1994; Sdzuj 1997. Lutz Danneberg is one of the most prolific scholars in the field. He is editor of the series 'Historia Hermeneutica. Series Studia' (22 volumes until 2023); the first volume of the series was Schönert & Vollhardt 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Chladenius 1742.

<sup>9</sup> Meier 1757.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lange 2017. Schleiermacher would certainly be surprised to learn that today his hermeneutics is regarded as his most important philosophical achievement.

theory of interpretation. His diagnosis was that hermeneutics existed only in the form of several specialized techniques (1977, p. 75). In his theoretical reflections, he abandoned the traditional focus on authoritative texts. The principles at work in oral communication and everyday texts (newspapers, letters) were seen to be identical with those applied in the interpretation of classical texts. More importantly, he rejected basic tenets concerning the nature of language that his predecessors had almost unanimously defended<sup>11</sup>. As has been remarked already, language had been understood on the basis of a two tier-structure. On the first level, objects are represented by mental or cognitive representations (ideas). On the second level, mental or cognitive representations are signified by words or signs. The first level was attributed undisputed priority. Schleiermacher criticized this hierarchical order. He had reservations with respect to strong conceptions of pure reason and doubted the adequacy of a conception that treated rationality, thought and concepts as primary and as independent of language. In contrast to this position, Schleiermacher underlined the interdependence of thought and language.

He also distinguished two basic attitudes with regard to text interpretation. The more common and easy-going attitude takes comprehension for granted. Interpretation is only needed in case of particular problems and difficulties. This corresponds to the prevailing form of traditional hermeneutics by focusing on specific parts of a text. The stricter practice, on the other hand, assumes that misunderstanding must be taken as the normal case. Consequently, understanding has to be searched for in every part of the text and in the text as a whole (Schleiermacher, 1977, p. 92).

In this manner, interpretation is to be divided into two varieties and makes use of two methods:

(1) *Grammatical interpretation* explains the meaning by reference to the general system of the respective language.

<sup>11</sup> Prominent exceptions are G. Vico, J. G. Herder, and Schleiermacher's contemporary W. v. Humboldt.

- (2) *Technical or psychological interpretation* analyses the particular way a speaker or author makes use of his language.
  - (1) and (2) are complementary (1977, p. 79).
- (3) The *comparative method* explains obscure meaning by recourse to parts of the text that have already been interpreted.
- (4) The *method of divination* uses intuition and empathy (*Einfühlung*) to determine the meaning of the text.
- (1), (2), (3), and (4) are applied together with varying weight depending on the issue and the competence of the interpreter 12 (1977, p. 169).

Language stood at the centre of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic preoccupations. In his analysis of the process of concept formation he drew attention to the impact of language on thought: "Alles in der Hermeneutik vorauszusetzende ist nur Sprache, und alles zu findende, wohin auch die anderen objectiven und subjectiven Voraussetzungen gehören, muß aus der Sprache gefunden werden" (Schleiermacher, 1974, p. 34).

Often, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) is presented as the successor of Schleiermacher. Indeed, Dilthey wrote an extensive biography of Schleiermacher, and he is known for his effort to secure an epistemological foundation for the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The German word *Geisteswissenschaften* is strictly speaking untranslatable<sup>13</sup>. It is intensely imbued with connotations related to the history of German academic traditions and institutions. "Humanities" is sometimes used as translation, but this unfortunately obscures the component *Wissenschaft* (science). On the other hand, translating *Geisteswissenschaften* as "human sciences" is problematic because the human sciences include empirical disciplines like anthropology or ethnology that don't fit well under the umbrella of *Geisteswissenschaften*. In order to avoid misunderstanding, I shall continue to use the German term, despite the linguistic clumsiness involved.

<sup>12</sup> Gadamer's view that there was a bias for psychological interpretation and divination in Schleiermacher has been long since revised.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Gens 2019.

Dilthey himself occasionally referred to this project as a "Critique of historical reason." It is in this context that problems of understanding and interpretation came to the fore. According to Dilthey, the *Geisteswissenschaften* are separated from the natural sciences. The natural sciences seek causal explanations first and foremost. The *Geisteswissenschaften*, contrastingly, aspire to an understanding of human thought, experience, and action through interpretation 15. Dilthey was convinced that causal explanations cannot provide an adequate knowledge of historical events or historical actions because these are not instances of general laws but individual entities. Individuality as an irreducible phenomenon cannot be exhaustively determined by general concepts, nor can it be subsumed under general laws 16.

The interpretation of *Lebensäußerungen* (expressions of life experience) is a genuine achievement of the Geisteswissenschaften<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Dilthey makes use of this formulation in the dedication of "Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften" (1883) to Paul Yorck von Wartenburg (GS IX); later, he wrote "Das höchste Ziel ist, durch eine Kritik der historischen Vernunft das Vermögen derselben in seiner ganzen Kraft zur Geltung zu bringen. –Was Kant negativ–dieses soll positiv sein–freimachen von Metaphysik und in seiner positiven Kraft zur Geltung bringen, das Wissen des Menschen von sich selbst" (GS V, p. LIII).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Unter einer erklärenden Wissenschaft ist jede Unterordnung eines Erscheinungsgebietes unter einen Kausalzusammenhang vermittels einer begrenzten Zahl von eindeutig bestimmten Elementen [...] zu verstehen" (GS V, p. 139). "[In den Geisteswissenschaften überwiegen] die Beschreibung (Erzählung), Analyse und vergleichende Methode, welche in den Naturwissenschaften gegen Induktion, Experiment und mathematische Theorie mehr zurücktreten. Dann tritt zu diesen Methoden in den Geisteswissenschaften eine denselben eigene hinzu, welche die Hineinverlegung des eignen Selbst in dem Vorgang des Verstehens gegründet ist. Dies ist die hermeneutische und mit ihr verbunden kritische Methode, welche nicht nur vom Philologen und Historiker geübt wird, sondern ohne die keine Geisteswissenschaft bestehen kann" (GS V, p. 262).

<sup>16 &</sup>quot;Jedes Leben hat einen eigenen Sinn. [...] Dieser Sinn des individuellen Daseins ist ganz singular, dem Erkennen unauflösbar, und er repräsentiert doch in seiner Art [...] das geschichtliche Universum" (GSVII, p. 199).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Die Geisteswissenschaften sind [...] fundiert in diesem Zusammenhang von Leben, Ausdruck und Verstehen. Hier erst erreichen wir ein ganz klares Merkmal, durch welches die Abgrenzung der Geisteswissenschaften definitiv vollzogen werden kann. Eine Wissenschaft gehört nur dann den Geisteswissenschaften an, wenn ihr Gegenstand uns durch das Verhalten zugänglich wird, das im Zusammenhang von Leben, Ausdruck und Verstehen fundiert ist." (GSVII, p. 87).

The word *Lebensäuβerung* refers to the whole range of behaviour that is meaningful, not only to linguistic utterances but equally to gestures, facial expression, body language etc. Categories used by the *Geisteswissenschafte* in order to analyse these phenomena are value (*Wert*), purpose (*Zweck*), and structure (*Struktur*).

The search for a proper characterization of the *Geisteswissenschaften* occupied Dilthey throughout his carrier. He established a highly influential dualism of sciences: the natural sciences present explanations, while the *Geisteswissenschaften* enable us to understand the historical world of human beings<sup>18</sup>. Understanding is the result of successful interpretation and appropriation of meaning<sup>19</sup>. But according to Dilthey, understanding is not only opposed to causal explanation. According to him, it cannot be reduced to conceptual cognition at all<sup>20</sup>. Dilthey tried to formulate a descriptive psychology that was to function as an epistemological and methodological basis for the *Geisteswissenschaften*<sup>21</sup>. He thought the irreducibili-

<sup>&</sup>quot;Die Natur erklären wir, das Seelenleben verstehen wir" (GS V, p. 144). In the reception Dilthey's conception has sometimes been deformed and turned into a disjunction. That, of course, was not Dilthey's claim: "Selbstverständlich sind es dieselben logischen Operationen, durch welche auf allen Gebieten gleichmäßig Tatsachen in Beziehung zueinander gesetzt werden. Mögen diese Tatschen physische oder geistige sein, mögen sie in der äußeren oder in der inneren Erfahrung auftreten, sie werden durch dieselben Denkakte und logischen Vorgänge miteinander verbunden. Vergleichen, sonach Unterscheiden, Gleichfinden und Grade des Unterschiedes bestimmen, Verbinden, Trennen, Urteilen, Schließen sind in Naturwissenschaften und in den Geisteswissenschaften gleichmäßig wirksam, die Verhältnisse von Tatsachen zur Erkenntnis zu bringen" (GS V, pp. 260–261).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Wir nennen den Vorgang, in welchem wir aus Zeichen, die von außen sinnlich gegeben sind, ein Inneres erkennen: Verstehen" (GS V, p. 318). "Eine Wissenschaft gehört nur dann den Geisteswissenschaften an, wenn ihr Gegenstand uns durch das Verhältnis zugänglich wird, das im Zusammenhang von Leben, Ausdruck und Verstehen fundiert ist [...]. Alle leitenden Begriffe, mit welchen diese Gruppe von Wissenschaften operiert, sind von den entsprechenden im Gebiete des Naturwissens verschieden" (GS VII, p. 87).

<sup>20 &</sup>quot;Nie kann [...] Verstehen in rationales Begreifen aufgehoben werden" (GS V, p. 278). H. Rickert criticized this conception of individuality with merciless severity. Cf. Rickert 1913 (p. 228); cf. also Teichert 2010.

<sup>21</sup> The dualism of the natural sciences and ,Geisteswissenschaften' and the project of a descriptive psychology can be seen in the larger context of the history of science and its institutional organisation of scholarship and research. Two factors are of interest: the emergence of the social sciences during Dilthey's lifetime and the emancipation of

ty of understanding to causal explanation was due mainly to two factors. Firstly, human experience includes individual emotional experiences of individuals that defy causal explanation. Secondly, historical events cannot be deduced form general laws. There simply are no general laws covering events like the assassination of J.F. Kennedy or the formulation of the theory of general relativity by A. Einstein. This is not only pertinent for *events*; it also holds for *periods* like the Reformation or *traditions* like the reverence to Mary as mother of God in Eastern Orthodoxy.

Dilthey realized that, in philosophy, the abandonment of metaphysical aspiration and transcendental systematization was inevitable<sup>22</sup>. But without strong foundations, it seemed difficult to evade relativism and irrationalism<sup>23</sup>. He tried to find a firm basis by taking recourse to life<sup>24</sup>. In his life-philosophical orientation he accorded great value to individuality as an unanalysable phenomenon, and distanced himself from a no longer acceptable rationalistic conception of human existence by stressing the negative factors of finitude (*Endlichkeit*), corruptibility (*Korruptiblität*)<sup>25</sup>, and fragility (*Gebrechlichkeit*)<sup>26</sup>.

psychology from philosophy. Traditionally, psychology had been part of the philosophical curriculum. In 1875 the University of Leipzig established the first chair for psychology, a decisive step for the emancipation of the discipline.

<sup>22 &</sup>quot;In den Adern des erkennenden Subjekts, das Locke, Hume und Kant konstruierten, rinnt nicht wirkliches Blut, sondern der verdünnte Sagt von Vernunft als bloßer Denktätigkeit." "[D]ie Zeit der metaphysischen Begründung der Geisteswissenschaften [ist] ganz vorüber [...]". (GS I, pp. XVIII–XIX). "Hegel konstruiert metaphysisch; wir analysieren das Gegebene" (GS VII, p. 150).

<sup>23 &</sup>quot;Die Endlichkeit jeder geschichtlichen Erscheinung, sie sei eine Religion oder ein Ideal oder philosophisches System, sonach die Relativität jeder Art von menschlicher Auffassung des Zusammenhanges der Dinge ist das letzte Wort der historischen Weltanschauung, alles im Prozeß fließend, nichts bleibend. Und dagegen erhebt sich das Bedürfnis des Denkens und das Streben der Philosophie nach einer allgemeingültigen Erkenntnis" (GSV, p. 9).

<sup>24 &</sup>quot;[H]inter das Leben kann das Denken nicht zurückgehen" (GSV, p. 5).

<sup>25</sup> GSVII, pp. 229, 325.

<sup>26 &</sup>quot;Und die heutige Analyse der menschlichen Existenz erfüllt uns alle mit dem Gefühl der Gebrechlichkeit, der Macht des dunklen Triebes, des Leidens an den Dunkelheiten und den Illusionen, der Endlichkeit in allem, was Leben ist [...]" (GSVII, p. 150).

Dilthey has often been presented as a predecessor of Heidegger and Gadamer. This view is grounded on two moments: first, Dilthey's merits as historiographer of the hermeneutical tradition; second, Dilthey's turn to a philosophy of life. With many precautions designed to evade the traps of psychologism and irrationalism, Dilthey reluctantly took leave from the primacy of logic and epistemology. He looked at the phenomena as expressions of life (*Lebensäußerung*) and inner experience<sup>27</sup>. He accorded a practical relevance to disciplines that investigated the social-historical world and ascribed a function of orientation to them<sup>28</sup>. But on the whole, Dilthey couldn't manage to combine his work's many different, sometimes antagonsistic tendencies into a cohesive whole.

With Martin Heidegger, hermeneutics became philosophical not as a methodology of interpretation, but as a philosophy of Verstehen (understanding) conceived as the basic mode of human existence. This transformation of hermeneutics can in part be seen as a transformation of Dilthey's ideas. Understanding in Heidegger takes the position that was reserved by traditional philosophy for reason, cognition and self-consciousness<sup>29</sup>. Inspired by Dilthey's preoccupation with the understanding of Lebensäußerung und Lebenszusammenhang, the early Heidegger used the concept of understanding for his own fundamental ontology (Fundamentalontologie). In his Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität) (1923) he unmistakably marks the distance between his own approach and tra-

<sup>27 &</sup>quot;Wir nennen den Vorgang, in welchem wir aus Zeichen, die von außen sinnlich gegeben sind, ein Inneres erkennen: Verstehen" (GS V, p. 318).

<sup>28 &</sup>quot;Die Bedeutung der Geisteswissenschaften und ihrer Theorie kann zunächst nur darin liegen, daß sie ums zu dem helfen, was wir in der Welt zu machen haben, was wir aus uns machen können und diese mit uns" (GS VII, p. 276).

<sup>29</sup> Again, the translation of the German expressions is not without problems. 'Verstehen' in German stands in relation to 'Verstand' as well as its English equivalents, but at the same time it bears multiple connotations beyond cognition or intellectual apprehension. It can apply to a wide range of sensitive or affective experiences as well ('Verständnis'). "bei verstehen sind zwei grosze gruppen zu sondern, je nachdem es zur bezeichnung geistiger vorgänge oder sinnlicher verhältnisse verwendet wird" (Grimm & Grimm, 1999) <a href="https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=V04914">https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=V04914</a> (18.01.2024).

ditional hermeneutics<sup>30</sup>. The break is radical. Whereas traditional hermeneutics was a matter of intellectual culture, Heideggerian understanding is a ubiquitous phenomenon, a universal mode of Dasein. Heidegger's analysis exposes the relations between the individual (Dasein) and the world it inhabits. Understanding is rooted primarily in everyday experience. It is the awareness of sense and meaning at the basic level of human existence. Even pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic states offer access to sense and meaning. However, Heidegger's interest in hermeneutics didn't last over a long period. He probably realized that the term 'hermeneutics' itself diverted the attention from the new, existential level of analysis<sup>31</sup>. Dasein is determined by the fundamental category of understanding which is no longer a cognitive or epistemological category, but an ontological concept designed to characterise the existence of Dasein.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Die Hermeneutik hat die Aufgabe, das je eigene Dasein in seinem Seinscharakter diesem Dasein selbst zugänglich zu machen, mitzuteilen, der Selbstentfremdung, mit der das Dasein geschlagen ist, nachzugehen. In der Hermeneutik bildet sich für das Dasein eine Möglichkeit aus, für sich selbst verstehend zu werden und zu sein. [...] Thema der hermeneutischen Untersuchung ist je eigenes Dasein [...]" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 15); cf. Grondin, 2003 (pp. 44–48).

<sup>31</sup> In SZ, the term Hermeneutik occurs only rarely. Heidegger explains that the philosophical relevance of hermeneutics consists in the fact that hermeneutics is the exegesis of the being of Dasein in the sense of an analysis of the existentiality of existence: "Und sofern schließlich das Dasein den ontologischen Vorrang hat vor allem Seienden – als Seiendes in der Möglichkeit der Existenz, erhält die Hermeneutik als Auslegung des Seins des Daseins einen spezifischen dritten - den, philosophisch verstanden, primären Sinn einer Analytik der Existenzialität der Existenz. In dieser Hermeneutik ist dann, sofern sie die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins ontologisch ausarbeitet als die ontische Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Historie, das verwurzelt, was nur abgeleiteterweise "Hermeneutik" genannt werden kann: die Methodologie der historischen Geisteswissenschaften" (SZ, pp. 37-38; other occurrences in pp. 25, 72 fn. 1, 138, 398, 436). "And finally, to the extent that Dasein, as an entity with the possibility of existence, has ontological priority over every other entity, 'hermeneutic,' as an interpretation of Dasein's Being, has the third and specific sense of an analytic of the existentiality of existence; and this is the sense which is philosophically primary. Then so far as this hermeneutic works out Dasein's historicality ontologically as the ontical condition for the possibility of historiology, it contains the roots of what can be called 'hermeneutic' only in a derivative sense: the methodology of those humane sciences [...]" (BT, p. 62).

To sum up, one can divide the historical development of hermeneutics into two sections. During the first period, hermeneutics is primarily concerned with practices and methods of interpretation of texts and other artefacts. Interpretation is the methodologically controlled way to the correct and adequate understanding of a word, a phrase, a text.

During the second period, Heidegger shifts interpretation to the background and focuses on understanding conceived as the universal access to sense and meaning for human beings, thereby replacing traditional metaphysical and epistemic concepts like knowledge or justification.

Gadamer clearly is following Heidegger's ontological approach. But at the same time, he continues to work on problems that are treated by pre-Heideggerian hermeneutics. The following remarks shall expose the ambiguities that arise from this attitude.

#### 2. Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

## 2.1. Language

Gadamer repeatedly insists on the distance that separates his hermeneutic philosophy from linguistics, philology, and philosophy of language<sup>32</sup>. This distance is due to his conviction that linguistics and orthodox philosophies of language are not capable of tackling the philosophically basic question "What is language?" in its sober generality. Of course, it is a legitimate undertaking to describe languages as empirical objects or to analyse universal patterns of language. But these inquiries pursue other interests than those that are essential for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

To explain language, one always has to use language. If one has to presuppose language in order to explain language, then there is

<sup>32 &</sup>quot;Es fragt sich nämlich, ob der Begriff von Sprache, von dem die moderne Sprachwissenschaft und die Sprachphilosophie ausgehen, der Sachlage überhaupt gerecht wird" (GW I, p. 407), "It is doubtful that the concept of language that modern linguistics and philosophy of language take as their starting point is adequate to the situation" (TM, p. 422).

no way to give a non-circular account<sup>33</sup>. Circularity is no threat for Gadamer himself. But insofar as the scientific approaches are committing themselves to non-circular forms of theorizing, they are in a muddle if they cannot evade circularity. Linguists and orthodox philosophers of language are well aware of this, and they try to get away from circularity through recourse to the distinction of metalanguage vs. object language or by way of introducing formal languages. Gadamer, on the contrary, clings to the idea that what is philosophically primary is the native language. Consequently, he dismisses the project of a systematically constructed theory of language. Gadamer invites his readers to realise that it may be philosophically sensible to ask what it means for human beings to live a life that is almost completely formed by language. He looks critically at all attempts to define language as an object, as an instrument of communication, as a cognitive function, as a device for representation<sup>34</sup>.

However, this manoeuvre is not without problems. How can philosophical hermeneutics defend this critical stance towards linguistics and philosophy of language? How could one ignore the fact

<sup>33 &</sup>quot;[E]s gibt keinen Standort außerhalb der sprachlichen Welterfahrung, von dem her sie selber zum Gegenstand gemacht zu werden vermöchte"; (GW 1, p. 456), "[T]here is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could become an object" (TM, p. 469).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Die Sprache ist nicht eines der Mittel, durch die sich das Bewußtsein mit der Welt vermittelt. Sie stellt nicht neben dem Zeichen und dem Werkzeug [...] ein drittes Instrument dar. Die Sprache ist überhaupt kein Instrument, kein Werkzeug" (GW 2, p. 148); "Überall, wo das Wort eine bloße Zeichenfunktion übernimmt, wird der ursprüngliche Zusammenhang von Sprechen und Denken, auf den unser Interesse gerichtet ist, in ein instrumentales Verhältnis umgewandelt. Dieses verwandelte Verhältnis von Wort und Zeichen liegt der Begriffsbildung der Wissenschaft insgesamt zugrunde und ist für uns so selbstverständlich geworden, daß es einer eigenen kunstvollen Erinnerung bedarf, daß neben dem wissenschaftlichen Ideal eindeutiger Bezeichnung das Leben der Sprache selbst unverändert weitertreibt" (GW 1, p. 437), "[W]herever words assume a mere sign function, the original connection between speaking and thinking, with which we are concerned, has been changed into an instrumental relationship. This changed relationship of word and sign is at the basis of concept formation in science and has become so self-evident to us that it requires a special effort of memory to recall that, alongside the scientific ideal of unambiguous designation, the life of language itself continues unchanged" (TM, p. 450).

that linguistic research offers valuable theories analysing conditions and structures of particular languages and communication?

Gadamer does not ignore these theories, even if some of his pronouncements are harsh. The essential point of his critique is directed against the monopolistic authority attributed to science in general, and to objectifying concepts of language in particular. Gadamer is critical with respect to the claim that linguistic theory and philosophy of language can offer exhaustive theories<sup>35</sup>. In his own perspective, language is an encompassing mode of being and a cultural practice formed by tradition. The condition for the acquisition of a native language is the participation in a form of life, in common practices, the interaction with others that allows the process of acculturation to take place. The point of this ontological approach is the insight that practices are not objects. Of course, they may become objects of descriptions on the level of reflection. But Gadamer adamantly insists on the fact that it would be a category-mistake to treat language on the basic level as an object. There simply is no such thing.

Consequently, Gadamer accords special privilege to *dialogue*, *question and answer*, *polysemy*, and *metaphoricity*. Thereby, he distances himself *vis-à-vis* traditional as well as contemporary philosophies of language that place *propositions*, *assertions*, and *declarative sentences* at the centre of attention. Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, the concept of rationality has been tightly linked to the ability to

<sup>35 &</sup>quot;Wir sehen vor allem in unseren Tagen, wie sich der Anspruch der Wissenschaft, die einzig legitime Erkenntnisweise des Menschen zu sein [...] dazu geführt hat, daß sich innerhalb dessen, was man landläufig Philosophie nennt, die Wissenschaftstheorie und Logik sowie die Analyse der Sprache in den Vordergrund gerückt haben. Die Begleiterscheinung dieser zunehmenden Tendenz ist, daß alles andere, was man Philosophie nennt, als Weltanschauungen oder als Ideologien aus der Philosophie verwiesen und damit letzten Endes einer von außen geführten Kritik unterworfen wird, die nicht mehr erlaubt, daß sie als Erkenntnis gelten" (GW 2, p. 78). There are indeed statements which are quite often interpreted as claims to an unrestrained hegemony of the scientific approach like the famous phrase of W. Sellars "[I]in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not." (Sellars, 1989, p. 173).

give reasons. From Antiquity to the present, reasons are given by drawing valid conclusions from premises.

Gadamerian hermeneutics attempts to offer an alternative. The monological theories of *inferential reasoning* become part of a much more comprehensive model of language. The hermeneutic idea of language mainly consists in a model of dialogue as an *interplay of questions and answers*<sup>36</sup>. The fact that Gadamer himself uses the term "logic of question and answer" is rather unfortunate. He never gives a glimpse at the principles and rules of a proper "logic" of questions and answers. Nevertheless, his basic idea is quite clear. Propositions, assertions, declarative sentences are certainly important forms of thought and language. However, they cannot be treated in isolation if an adequate understanding is required<sup>37</sup>. The context of the utterance, its horizon, has to be taken into consideration. The interlocutor has to recognise the questions the phrase is intended to answer or the questions it helps to articulate.

Gadamer's opponents will retort and claim that statements or propositions can surely be treated in isolation, as the history of logic since Aristotle shows. But for Gadamer this is not really of interest. For him, logic is an abstraction or even distortion of human language. And he does not restrict his critique to formal logic alone, but extends it to all attempts to fix the cognitive content of concepts in an ahistorical way. The desire to get conceptual con-

<sup>36 &</sup>quot;For language is essentially the language of conversation" (TM, p. 450, with modifications); "Die Vollzugsweise der Sprache ist der Dialog" (GW 2, p. 110).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Es gibt keine Aussage, die man allein auf ihren Inhalt hin, den sie vorlegt auffassen kann, wenn man sie in ihrer Wahrheit erfassen will. Jede Aussage ist motiviert. Jede Aussage hat Voraussetzungen, die sie nicht aussagt. Nur wer diese Voraussetzungen mitdenkt, kann die Wahrheit einer Aussage wirklich ermessen. Nun behaupte ich: die letzte logische Form solcher Motivation jeder Aussage ist die Frage. Nicht das Urteil, sondern die Frage hat in der Logik den Primat, wie auch der platonische Dialog und der dialektische Ursprung der griechischen Logik geschichtlich bezeugen. Der Primat der Frage gegenüber der Aussage bedeutet aber, daß die Aussage wesenhaft Antwort ist. Es gibt kein Verstehen irgendeiner Aussage, das nicht aus dem Verständnis der Frage, auf die sie antwortet, ihren alleinigen Maßstab gewinnt" (GW 2, p. 52).

tent determined definitively appears to him to be a symptom of intellectual disorientation<sup>38</sup>.

Even if one does not follow Gadamer here, one can agree that the attempt to affix crystalline meanings definitively, to eliminate polysemy, ambiguities, and metaphors, to bring to a stop the dynamics of semantic change, to establish universal univocality is at least ambivalent. It can promote epistemic virtues like precision and accuracy that are indispensable in formal languages and necessary in the context of scientific theory construction. But it can also function as a suppressant of intellectual freedom and degenerate into domination by institutional restraint.

Occasionally, Gadamer draws on the multiple meanings of the German word *die Aussage* (statement, utterance, testimony):

Was es heißt, Aussagen zu machen, und wie wenig das ein Sagen dessen ist, was man meint, weiß jeder, der einmal ein Verhör – uns sei es auch nur als Zeuge – durchgemacht hat. In der Aussage wird der Sinnhorizont dessen, was eigentlich zu sagen ist, mit methodischer Exaktheit verdeckt. Was übrigbleibt, ist der 'reine' Sinn der Aussage. Er ist das, was zu Protokoll geht. Er ist aber als so auf das Ausgesagte reduzierter schon immer ein entstellter Sinn. (GW 1, p. 473)<sup>39</sup>

The sense of the testimony is deformed insofar as it is given in a situation of strict asymmetry for the participants. The inquirer (police or judge) and the person interrogated are not on equal footing. And the answers are not expected to expand freely on the object of the

<sup>38 &</sup>quot;Der Furor des Laien, der nach eindeutigen Definitionen verlangt, aber ebenso der Eindeutigkeitswahn einer einseitigen, semantischen Erkenntnistheorie verkennen, was Sprache ist und daß auch die Sprache des Begriffs nicht erfunden, nicht willkürlich verändert, gebraucht und weggelegt werden kann, sondern dem Element entstammt, in dem wir uns denkend bewegen. Nur die erstarrten Krusten dieses lebendigen Stroms von Denken und Sprechen begegnen in der Kunstform der Terminologie" (GW 2, p. 113).

<sup>39 &</sup>quot;Anyone who has experienced an interrogation—even if only as a witness—knows what it is to make a statement and how little it is a statement of what one means. In a statement the horizon of meaning of what remains is said is concealed by methodological exactness; what remains is the 'pure' sense of the statements. That is what goes on the record. But meaning thus reduced to what is stated is always distorted meaning" (TM, p. 485).

inquiry, but to be focused on the facts as defined by the institutional context and the interests of the inquirer. The information given may be clear and exact. But restrictions are strict and do not allow the speaker to deviate from the setting. The person interrogated has no right to ask questions herself. Despite the fact that an interrogation is a dialogue between at least two speakers, an interrogation by the police or in court can be regarded only in a superficial way as a dialogue. It is just the opposite of what Gadamer describes in his philosophical hermeneutics as dialogue.

Sometimes it may be clear that a question is asked in order to get particular information. Typical examples are disjunctive questions, "Did you see the accused take the train at Central Station at 5 p.m.?". In this case, only one of two possible answers, "Yes" or "No" is expected. But these are not examples of the kind of questions Gadamer has in mind<sup>40</sup>. His logic of question and answer is exemplified by cases where a question is the articulation of an orientation towards sense in an open form. Questions like "What shall I do with my life?" cannot be answered sensibly by saying "Take the train at 5 p.m." or the like. It is not the articulation of determinate information that is required, but the openness to participate in conversation and reflection<sup>41</sup>.

Gadamer places emphasis on the priority of questions over statements and answers. Propositions, declarative sentences and assertions fulfil their functions as elements of forms of life; they are embedded in dialogue and exchange of arguments. Sentences become meaningful thanks to background questions they are sup-

<sup>40</sup> This is, probably, the reason why the *quaestio* as method of philosophical inquiry practiced in scholastic philosophy plays no role in Gadamer's remarks on questioning 'Quaestiones' were formulated as a disjunctive questions (*utrum...an*); cf. Schulthess & Imbach, 2002 (pp. 147–153).

<sup>41 &</sup>quot;Ein Gespräch ist ja keine wohlprogrammierte Abhandlung" (GW 10, p. 162). "Die Vollzugsform jedes Gesprächs läßt sich [...] vom Begriff des Spieles her beschreiben" (GW 2, p. 151). Two moments in the occidental history of ideas where questioning plays a significant role may be retained as background. The first is the Socratic way of questioning, testing and criticising beliefs in the pursuit of truth. The second is the religious questioning, conceiving of human beings as searching, addressing, and questioning God; cf. Jaul 1982.

posed to answer, or at least, they are motivated by such questions. Questions can provide an access to virtual meanings and initiate the *formation of concepts (Begriffsbildung)*.

Whereas scientific theories of language construct closed theories, philosophical hermeneutics aspires to give an account of the openness of language. Natural languages are permanently in flux. They come and go. Not only are there dead languages like Akkadian, Sumerian, ancient Greek or Latin. New languages may appear in the future. But firstly and most importantly, languages are not stable entities. Human languages are in many respects just the opposite of the precisely defined formal languages some philosophers chose as paradigms during the 20th century. Scientific theories try to capture the fluidity of the natural languages. Diachronic linguistics and historical studies prove that they can do this successfully. De Saussure's fundamental distinction between langue and parole is conceived to cope with the dynamics of linguistic change. Again, there is no direct conflict between the scientific approach and hermeneutical philosophy. But Gadamer insists that the dynamics of human languages, their historicality cannot be controlled or be the object of an exhaustive knowledge. Metaphoricity, Polysemy, irony, ambiguity obviate the reduction to univocal conceptual content, but they should not be seen exclusively in a negative way, as obstacles and obstructions of pure, transparent meaning. It is the language of the poets that exemplifies the unlimited openness and wealth of language in an unmatched manner.

The dictum *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache* is sometimes presented as the appeal of Gadamer's hermeneutics of language (GW 1, p. 478)<sup>42</sup>. I shall try to lay bare some of the implications of the phrase.

(1) Gadamer explicitly denies propagating a metaphysics of language that reduces everything to language <sup>43</sup>.

<sup>42 &</sup>quot;Being that can be understood is language" (TM, p. 490).

<sup>43 &</sup>quot;Es gibt vorsprachliche Welterfahrung [...]" (GW 2, p. 204); "Es wäre absurd zu behaupten, daß alle unsere Welterfahrung nichts als ein Sprachvorgang sei [...]" (GW

- (2) Gadamer does not defend an anti-realist philosophy. He takes his stand with Husserl's phenomenology<sup>44</sup>. A phenomenon is not a mere appearance, in the sense of something that is to be distinguished from the real thing. There is no possibility for humans to get closer to reality than by contact with phenomena. Reality is the actuality of the phenomena human beings are confronted with in experience. This does not imply that there is no difference between knowledge and error, hallucination and perception. One can tell the difference between the *dream* of hearing the waves while standing at the beach and looking at the horizon, and the sense perception of hearing the waves while standing at the beach and looking at the horizon. Gadamer does never refer to Sein in the metaphysical acceptation as reality in itself, independent of the phenomena experienced by human beings. "The idea of reaching a complete knowledge of Sein is a metaphysical illusion"<sup>45</sup>. He shares the opinion of those who reject the direct recourse to extra-mental, extra-conceptual or extra-linguistic reality as a myth. The cognitive, conceptual and linguistic resources of human beings certainly depend on natural or evolutionary conditions, but they are in themselves not natural properties of a biological species but cultural acquisitions. They are the results of learning, social interaction, and tradition.
- (3) Gadamer links *phemonena*, *thought*, and *language*. There is no principled demarcation between thought and language <sup>46</sup>. Gada-

<sup>2,</sup> p. 256); "'Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache' [...] Führt dieser Satz nicht angesichts der Universalität der Sprache zu der unhaltbaren metaphysischen Folgerung, daß'alles' nur Sprache und Sprachgeschehen ist? [...] Offenbar droht von diesem Aspekt her die Gefahr, die eigentliche Wirklichkeit des Geschehens [...] abzuschwächen und in eine Form der Sinnerfahrung zu verfälschen" (GW 2, pp. 444–445).

<sup>44 &</sup>quot;[M]ein Buch steht methodisch auf phänomenologischem Boden" (GW 2, p. 446); "[D] er Gebrauch des Begriffs 'Welt an sich' [wird] problematisch"; (GW 1, p. 451), "[T]he expression "world in itself" [becomes] problematic" (TM, p. 463).

<sup>45 &</sup>quot;Die Idee einer absoluten Vernunft ist eine Illusion" (GW 8, p. 167).

<sup>46 &</sup>quot;Alle Welterkenntnis des Menschen ist sprachlich vermittelt. Ein erste Weltorientierung vollendet sich im Sprechenlernen. Aber nicht nur das. Die Sprachlichkeit unseres Inder-Welt-Seins artikuliert am Ende den ganzen Bereich der Erfahrung" (GW 2, p. 112); "Wir sind in allem unserem Denken und Erkennen immer schon voreingenommen durch die sprachliche Weltauslegung, in die hineinwachsen in der Welt aufwachsen heißt. Insofern ist die Sprache die eigentliche Spur unserer Endlichkeit" (GW 2, p. 150).

mer's phenomenological approach denies every form of recourse to being (or reality) that is not mediated through language.

- (4) Gadamer excludes a hierarchical ordering of thought, language, and understanding. With respect to language and understanding, the idea of taking the activities of the speakers as primary is disregarded as an impasse. One cannot explain language, that is the phenomenon of linguistic meaning, by referring to a situation where human beings come to an agreement about the meaning of a word. To introduce a meaning by convention, one always has to use language. This implies, that there have to be at least two people using language in order to introduce meaning by convention. Therefore, it is not possible to explain the constitution of language and linguistic meaning on the foundational level by conventions.
- (5) Gadamer presents language, Seinsgeschehen, Wirkungsgeschichte as neo-subjects thereby contradicting the traditional conceptions of an epistemic subject whose activities are fundamental.

Auch dies [i.e. das Verstehen] ist nicht als eine einfache Tätigkeit des verstehenden Bewußtseins zu fassen, sondern als eine Weise des Seinsgeschehens selber. Ganz formell gesprochen weist der Primat, den Sprache und Verstehen in Heideggers Denken besitzen, auf die Vorgängigkeit des "Verhältnisses" gegenüber seinen Beziehungsgliedern, dem Ich, das versteht, und dem, was verstanden wird. [...] Das Verhältnis von Verstehen und Verstandenem hat vor dem Verstehen und dem Verstandenen den Primat, genau wie das Verhältnis von Sprechendem und Gesprochenem auf einen Bewegungsvollzug weist, der weder im einen noch im anderen Glied der Relation seine feste Basis hat. (GW 2, p. 126)

(6) The key concepts of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics—language (*Sprache*), understanding (*Verstehen*), conversation (*Gespräch*), truth (*Wahrheit*), sense (*Sinn*), meaning (*Bedeutung*), play (*Spiel*)—can often be mutually substituted or be used as complements for each other<sup>47</sup>. In this way, Gadamer does not offer a struc-

<sup>47</sup> SZ §28 is the specific background. Confronted with the impossibility of proceeding by way of deduction of the phenomenon, Heidegger analyses the 'Gleichursprünglichkeit'

tured account of the conditions that regulate thought and speech, but he evokes the basic dimensions of human experience<sup>48</sup>.

(7) Gadamer makes frequent use of *dialectical statements*. Understanding projects itself onto being. Being appears as language. The relation of understanding to being is presented as interpretation. Diverse variants of this complex reflexiveness are recurrent in TM<sup>49</sup>.

Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Das hermeneutische Phänomen wirft hier gleichsam seine eigene Universalität auf die Seinsverfassung des Verstandenen zurück, indem es dieselbe in einem universellen Sinne als Sprache bestimmt und seinen eigenen Bezug auf das Seiende als Interpretation. (GW 1, p. 478)<sup>50</sup>

<sup>(&#</sup>x27;equiprimordiality') of its constitutive moments. The constitutive moments are neither individually nor collectively derived from a grounding principle. Together they constitute the phenomenon.

<sup>48 &</sup>quot;Geschichte, Sprache, Gespräch und Spiel: alles dies sind – das ist das Entscheidende vertauschbare Größen. Zwischen ihnen gibt es keinen Bedingungszusammenhang mehr" (Schulz, 1970, p. 311).

<sup>&</sup>quot;Was verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache. Das will sagen, es ist so, daß es sich von sich aus dem Verstehen darstellt. Auch von dieser Seite bestätigt sich die spekulative Struktur der Sprache. Zur-Sprache-kommen heißt nicht, ein zweites Dasein bekommen. Als was sich etwas darstellt, gehört vielmehr zu seinem eigenen Sein. Es handelt sich also bei all solchem, das Sprache ist, um eine spekulative Einheit, eine Unterscheidung in sich, zu sein und sich darzustellen, eine Unterscheidung, die doch auch gerade keine Unterscheidung sein soll" (GW 1, p. 479); "That which can be understood is language. This means that it is of such a nature that of itself it offers itself to be understood. Here too is confirmed the speculative structure of language. To come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired. Rather, what something presents itself as belongs to its own being. Thus everything that is language has a speculative unity: it contains a distinction, that between its being and it presentation of itself, but this is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all" (TM, p. 491). With respect to historical knowledge: "Der wahre historische Gegenstand ist kein Gegenstand, sondern die Einheit dieses Einen und Anderen, ein Verhältnis, in dem die Wirklichkeit der Geschichte ebenso wie die Wirklichkeit des geschichtlichen Verstehens besteht" (GW I, p. 305); "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (TM, p. 310, with modifications).

<sup>50 &</sup>quot;Being that can be understood is language. It is as if the hermeneutical phenomenon projects its own universality back onto the ontological state of what is understood, determining it in a universal sense as language and determining its own relation to being as interpretation" (TM, p. 490, with modifications).

The distinction between being and language is resolved and a speculative unity established. Language is not the secondary representation of an independent, primary, reality. Language belongs to being and being is language. It is being itself that presents itself in language<sup>51</sup>. "Sein [ist] *Sprache*, *d.h. Sichdarstellen* [...]" (GW 1, p. 490)<sup>52</sup>.

(8) Gadamer's philosophy of language echoes the *speculative* dialectics of Plato and Hegel<sup>53</sup>. TM culminates in a remembrance

<sup>51 &</sup>quot;Nicht nur ist die Welt nur Welt, sofern sie zur Sprache kommt - die Sprache hat ihr eigentliches Dasein nur darin, daß sich in ihr die Welt darstellt. Die ursprüngliche Menschlichkeit der Sprache bedeutet also zugleich die ursprüngliche Sprachlichkeit des menschlichen In-der-Welt-Seins" (GW 1, p. 447); "Not only is the world insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it" (TM, p. 459). "Was zur Sprache kommt, ist zwar ein anderes, als das gesprochene Wort selbst. Aber das Wort ist nur Wort durch das, was in ihm zur Sprache kommt. Es ist in seinem eigenen sinnlichen Sein nur da, um sich in das Gesagte aufzuheben. Umgekehrt ist auch das, was zur Sprache kommt, kein sprachlos Vorgegebenes, sondern empfängt im Wort die Bestimmtheit seiner selbst" (GW 1, p. 479); "[W]hat comes into language is something different from the spoken word itself. But the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it. Its own physical being exists only in order to disappear into what is said. Likewise, that which comes into language is not something that is pregiven before language; rather, the word gives it its own determinateness" (TM, p. 491). "[I]n der Sprache stellt sich die Welt selber dar. Die sprachliche Welterfahrung ist 'absolut'. Sie übersteigt alle Relativitäten von Seinssetzung, weil sie alles Ansichsein umfaßt, in welchen Beziehungen (Relativitäten) immer es sich zeigt. Die Sprachlichkeit unserer Welterfahrung ist vorgängig gegenüber allem, das als seiend erkannt und angesprochen wird. Der Grundbezug von Sprache und Welt bedeutet daher nicht, daß die Welt Gegenstand der Sprache werde" (GW 1, pp. 453-454); "[I]n language the world presents itself. Verbal experience of the world is 'absolute'. It transcends all the relative ways being is posited because it embraces all being-in-itself, in whatever relationships (relativities) it appears. Our verbal experience of the world is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing. That language and world are related in a fundamental way does not mean, then, that world becomes the object of language" (TM, p. 466).

<sup>52 &</sup>quot;Language [is] self-presentation [...]" (TM, p. 502).

<sup>\*\*[</sup>N]ennen wir das Gemeinsame zwischen der metaphysischen und der hermeneutischen Dialektik das Spekulative. Spekulativ heißt hier das Verhältnis des Spiegelns. Sich spiegeln ist eine beständige Vertauschung. Etwas spiegelt sich in einem anderen, etwa das Schloß im Teich, heißt ja, daß der Teich das Bild des Schlosses zurückwirft. Das Spiegelbild ist durch die Mitte des Betrachters mit dem Anblick selbst wesenhaft verbunden. Es hat kein Sein für sich, es ist wie eine "Erscheinung", die nicht es selbst ist und doch den Anblick selbst spiegelbildlich erscheinen läßt. Es ist wie eine Verdoppelung, die doch nur die Existenz von einem ist" (GW 1 pp. 469–470); "[W]e call what is common to

of metaphysical speculation transfigured by philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer evokes a completely historicized ontology. Being manifests itself as sense and meaning. The appearance of being is a dynamical, manifold, autonomous process. There is no subjectivity endowed with power or independence to initiate, control or master the phenomena of the manifestations of sense. Experience is something that individuals are exposed to. The hermeneutic concept of the individual is that of an entity submitted to experiences, including the negative moments (finitude, fragility, frailty). Therefore, Gadamer's individual stands in opposition to the epistemic subject of rationalistic philosophies, exercising sovereign control over its thought and discursive operations. The experiencing individual hears the message of being as language. It realizes that what it understands is an effect of language and history.

(9) Gadamer adds a counterweight to finitude and the negative moments of human existence. He revitalises a figure of thought of *Platonism*. Truth is disclosed in the evidence of the beautiful. The beautiful, here, is not an aesthetic category, but an ontological concept that refers to the phenomenon of unmediated, immediate experience of evidence. Evidence discloses truth or sense. It is as if philosophical hermeneutics appears as the heir of the contemplative tradition in occidental metaphysics. The givenness of sense is the ground for our understanding. Sense and meaning are unavailable, they are not constituted by the individuals themselves, nor are individuals in a position of control. Understanding is primarily a brute fact; it is the way of being in a world that gives sense<sup>54</sup>.

the metaphysical und the hermeneutical dialectic the 'speculative element'. The word 'speculative' here refers to the mirror relation. Being is reflected involves a constant substitution of one thing for another. When something is reflected in something else, say, the castle in the lake, it means that the lake throws back the image of the castle. The mirror image is essentially connected with the actual sight of the thing through the medium of the observer. It has no being of its own; it is like an 'appearance' that is not itself and yet allows the thing to appear by means of a minor image. It is like a duplication that is still only the one thing" (TM pp. 481–482). Gadamer's speculation is not conceptually fine grained but suggestive as the repeated formula "es ist wie" ('it is like') shows: "es ist wie eine 'Erscheinung'" ("it is like an 'appearance'") and not "es ist eine Erscheinung" ("it is an appearance").

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Figal 2011 (pp. 200-203).

Reviewing (1) to (9) as explanations of "Being that can be understood is language", one may be skeptical with regard to the growing importance of speculative dialectics in this philosophy of language. In later years, Gadamer seems to have had reservations with respect to the final chapters of TM. In several articles published in the decades after the publication of TM he tried to elaborate further on his dialectical reflections on language<sup>55</sup>. But he maintained the basic thought that human life is thoroughly formed by the resources of language. And language is not a construction or an instrument designed by human beings, but an ontological process to which human beings are submitted.

This ontological perspective marks the difference between philosophical hermeneutics and other theories of language. However, there is a remarkable convergence of some of the later writings of Donald Davidson with Gadamer's views. Davidson wrote:

I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which languageusers acquire and then apply to cases. (Davidson, 1986, p. 174)

Gadamer could have agreed wholeheartedly. And Gadamer could have also consented to the following: "We understand others, but we cannot reduce this understanding to a branch of the natural sciences." (Davidson, 2006, p. 1056)

## 2.2. Historicality and Truth

Gadamer's focus is on cultural transmission and tradition as the basis of understanding. The disciplines of text interpretation perform their tasks thanks to a fundamental understanding entrenched in

<sup>55</sup> In 1975 Gadamer referred to the 3rd part of TM devoted to the problem of language as a mere sketch (*Problemskizze*; GW 10, p. 99). Later he said that his main preoccupation since the publication of TM was to work on these problems (Dutt, 1993, p. 36).

the form of life of contemporary culture. It is this primary understanding that sets the frame for the methodologically guided research activities. Gadamer wants his readers to realise:

- (i) The linguistic and conceptual resources employed in understanding texts, artefacts, cultures are handed down to us by tradition (*Überlieferungsgeschehen*).
- (ii) Knowledge of the past is conditioned by the past itself. This is the kernel of Gadamer's concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, another nearly untranslatable item in Gadamer's vocabulary<sup>56</sup>.

The possibility to recognize reflectively the ways in which our present situation is conditioned by history are severely restrained:

Geschichtlichsein heiβt, nie im Sichwissen Aufgehen. Alles Sichwissen erhebt sich aus geschichtlicher Vorgegebenheit, die wir mit Hegel "Substanz" nennen, weil sie alles subjektive Meinen und Verhalten trägt und damit auch alle Möglichkeit, eine Überlieferung in ihrer geschichtlichen Andersheit zu verstehen, vorzeichnet und begrenzt. (GW 1, p. 307)<sup>57</sup>

This has consequences for historical studies and the text interpreting disciplines. Positivists may concede that they are working with the instruments they have acquired within a certain cultural and academic milieu. But they are going to deny that this affects the validity and the truth of their results. They are committed to the view that the past is a realm of facts. The historical disciplines have to represent them correctly and truthfully.

This idea of the past as a realm of facts is at odds with Gadamer's ontological conception of temporality and historicality. Husserl's and Heidegger's analysis of time and temporality are the background of Gadamer's thinking on history (Geschichte) and his-

<sup>56 &</sup>quot;History of effects" (TM, p. 311); other nearly untranslatable words are Geschehen, Geschichtlickeit, Seinsgeschehen, Seinsvollzug, Seinsvalenz.

<sup>57 &</sup>quot;To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete. All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we can call "substance" because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity" (TM, p. 313).

toricality (Geschichtlichkeit). Historicality is distinct from history<sup>58</sup>. "History" refers either to the facts of the past (res gestae) or to the description of the past (historia rerum gestarum). Cosmology, geology, and the evolution of biological species inquire into the history of natural phenomena. Galaxies have a history, but they are not characterized by historicality. Historicality applies to a mode of being, namely to the existence of beings whose experiences are determined though temporality<sup>59</sup>.

Gadamer places emphasis on the limitations of possible knowledge and to the factors that determine what the historian is looking at and which perspective he adopts. Historicality does not only mean that human experience is dynamic and conditioned by temporality. The understanding individual can be aware of its own limitations. I can be conscious of the fact that I am looking at the past or investigating the interpretandum from a particular point of view. There are not only perspectives adopted by contemporary interpreters but also the perspectives of prior interpreters and the perspective of the historical period of the interpretandum itself. The concept of time in use during the respective historical period may diverge considerably from the interpreter's own conceptual equipment<sup>60</sup>. Perspectivism does not imply relativism. A perspective is a way to look at x and the acceptance of perspectivism does neither deny the existence of x nor deny other points of view of x. The positivist is annoyed by this way of speaking. She simply wants to get the facts right. If she is thinking that in contrast to the hermeneut she can get the facts right without adopting any perspective at all, she, of course, is wrong. But as long as she is working within a scientific community that shares strong beliefs as to what is the right perspective, she may ignore her error and congratulate herself and her colleagues on owning the truth.

<sup>58</sup> In German die Geschichtlichkeit is distinct from die Historizität; to preserve this distinction I am using here "historicality" as equivalent to die Geschichtlichkeit.

<sup>59</sup> Renthe-Fink 1974; David 2019.

<sup>60</sup> An excellent example is Assmann 1996.

The hermeneut takes a stand with the concept of dialogue, question and answer. As already stated, she knows that the questions with which she is addressing the past are themselves effects of the past. The interests with which she is analysing, describing and explaining historical phenomena, have been formed on the basis of traditions and practices of looking at the past. She thinks it would be searching in vain for a neutral and complete historical knowledge.

Where is the truth of philosophical hermeneutics to be found? Not in single assertions. Hermeneutic truth is not a concept; it is a metaphor. As light gives human beings the possibility to see, so truth is the condition that makes possible manifestations of sense and meaning. Hermeneutic truth refers to the accessibility of sense and meaning, to the widening of the interpreter's horizon that is due to the confrontation with texts that can be understood. But this, of course cannot be the last word.

## 2. 3. Interpretation and Circularity

What, then, is the relation of the ontology of language and the text interpreting disciplines? Where is a path from Gadamer's ontological truth to truth in interpretation to be found? Or is the abyss separating these two conceptions of truth unbridgeable? In the preface to the second edition of TM Gadamer told his readers that he was not interested in methodology:

Offenbar hat es zu Mißverständnissen geführt, daß ich den durch eine alte Tradition belasteten Ausdruck der Hermeneutik aufgriff. Eine "Kunstlehre" des Verstehens, wie es die ältere Hermeneutik sein wollte, lag nicht in meiner Absicht. Ich wollte nicht ein System von Kunstregeln entwickeln, die das methodische Verfahren der Geisteswissenschaften zu beschreiben oder gar zu leiten vermöchten. [...] Mein eigentlicher Anspruch aber war und ist ein philosophischer: Nicht, was wir tun, nicht, was wir tun sollten, sondern was über unser Wollen und Tun hinaus mit uns geschieht, steht in Frage. (GW 2, p. 438)<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61 &</sup>quot;My revival of the expression hermeneutics, with its long tradition, has apparently led to some misunderstandings. I did not intend to produce a manual for guiding

This, indeed, is an extraordinary statement. TM is devoting large sections to the discussion of theories of interpretation and to the history of the text interpreting and historical disciplines. Difficulties arise because there are passages in TM when the reader has the impression that the cognitive and epistemic dimension of interpretation is completely blotted out in favour of an ontology of understanding. Undoubtedly, Gadamer adds counterbalancing weight in other passages. But the dialectical slalom is despite its brilliant sophistication sometimes very demanding. P. Ricœur had his sights set on the puzzling consequences that result from Heidegger's ontological conception of understanding with respect to hermeneutics as the practice and theory of interpretation:

[Heidegger] a voulu que nous subordonnions la connaissance historique à la compréhension ontologique, comme un forme dérivée d'une forme originaire. Mais il ne nous donne aucun moyen de montrer en quel sens la compréhension proprement historique est dérivée de cette compréhension originaire. (Ricœur, 1969, p. 14)

Did we get from Gadamer what Heidegger didn't give to us? Sometimes Gadamer seems completely disinterested in answering the question articulated by Ricœur. His ontological speculations are often not related to the epistemological functions of philology and history: "Der Sinn meiner Untersuchungen ist [...] zu zeigen, daß Verstehen niemals ein subjektives Verhalten zu einem gegebenen 'Gegenstande' ist, sondern zur Wirkungsgeschichte, und das heißt: zum Sein dessen gehört, was verstanden wird" (GW 2, p. 441)<sup>62</sup>.

understanding in the manner of the earlier hermeneutics. I did not wish to elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodological procedure of the human sciences. [...] My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (TM, pp. xxv–xxvi).

<sup>62 &</sup>quot;At any rate, the purpose of my investigation is [...] to show that understanding is never a subjective relation to a given 'object' but to the history of its effect; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood" (TM, p. xxviii, italics added).

Some critical readers, interested in hermeneutics as a discipline of interpretation, draw the conclusion that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has completely failed<sup>63</sup>. Gadamer's adherents, on the other hand, welcome the ontological turn of hermeneutics and appear not to be seriously annoyed by the absence of detailed epistemological and methodological elucidations<sup>64</sup>. Which camp is the right one? Or is the right answer to be found in between?

Interpretation is an activity. Sense and meaning are ascribed to texts by readers and interpreters. Readers in general are free to project their ideas onto texts and other cultural artefacts as they wish. Philological and historical disciplines, however, are not unrestrained. They cannot arbitrarily ascribe meanings to texts and semiotic complexes without denying their epistemic function, which is to search for knowledge. The text interpreting disciplines pursue cognitive interests and are committed to the task to advance understanding through justifiable interpretation. Philologists and historians may ask how Gadamer's ontological truth is related to epistemic truth. Moreover, they will not agree that understanding is never a subjective activity directed at a text as object of inquiry. How could they affirm such a statement, since they are devoted to the task of reaching understanding through successful acts of interpretation?<sup>65</sup>

To ask these question does not mean to ignore the complex conditions and presuppositions of understanding and interpretation, the contextual and historical determinants that come into play. But in

<sup>63 &</sup>quot;Mit Philosophie allgemein hat die Problematik der sogenannten Philosophischen Hermeneutik jedoch nichts zu tun-sondern eher damit, dass dieser Ansatz den Begriff des Verstehens mit zum Teil problematischen theoretischen Manövern in extravaganter Weise verändert hat" (Detel, 2011, p. 166). This critical comment refers to Heidegger. With respect to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Detel's conclusion is equally negative.

<sup>64</sup> J. Grondin's contributions are a good example for an affirmative reading of Gadamer's work; cf. Grondin 1991.

<sup>65 &</sup>quot;It cannot possibly make sense to treat such assignments [i.e. assignments of truth-values to interpretations] as 'passive', a mere 'effect' of history, a matter entirely different to the use of supportive evidence" (Margolis, 1995, p. 61).

asking these questions Gadamer reveals his disinterest in conceptual distinctions as a source of vagueness and flourishing polysemy<sup>66</sup>.

To push aside epistemology and methodology in favor of a hermeneutic ontology does not seems to be a sensible option; firstly, because Gadamer himself accepts epistemological and methodological standards. Repeatedly, he claims to give the correct reading of a text, of a passage or to elucidate the meaning of a term in an adequate way<sup>67</sup>. Secondly, this approach is not sensible because important concepts in TM are directly related to hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation. The part of TM devoted to the ontological exposition of understanding and interpretation in the interpretative and historical disciplines, "Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience", makes frequently use of conceptions developed in the context of traditional hermeneutics<sup>68</sup>. It is not sense and meaning in general that are important; rather, the focus is on specific eminent texts, on classical works of art, literature and philosophy. This design corresponds more or less to that of Dilthey's work on the history of hermeneutics and the history of ideas. In this way, a relation of Gadamer's own work to traditional hermeneutics is maintained.

One of the most interesting passages that makes visible the way in which Gadamer combines traditional hermeneutics and the ontology of understanding is his treatment of the *hermeneutical circle*.

Reacting to the perspicacious critique of Bormann 1969, Gadamer wrote: "Die Zweideutigkeit, die er (Bormann) mir mit seiner höchst förderlichen Kritik nachweist, ist gewiß zu einem Teil die Folge meiner begrifflichen Schwäche, zum anderen aber liegt es dem Wesen der hermeneutischen Erfahrung zugrunde, unentschieden zu sein und ständig versucht, das, was man als Aussage eines anderen versteht, auch sachlich einleuchtend zu finden" (GW 2, p. 256, fn. 28). R. Wiehl ironically praised Gadamer as "master in competitions of philosophical ambiguities" ("Meister im Gewinnspiel mit philosophischen Vieldeutigkeiten") (Wiehl, 2003, p. 12).

<sup>67</sup> cf. GW 1 (p. 325); TM (pp. 329-330).

<sup>68</sup> It is evident, that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not following Heidegger in locating understanding at the most basic level of human life, but primarily looks at understanding texts in the occidental tradition. Gadamer even says that the appropriation of superior sense (*überlegener Sinn*) is the basic presupposition of his philosophical hermeneutics. "[D]ie Grundvoraussetzung der hermeneutischen Aufgabenstellung, die man nur nicht recht wahrhaben wollte und die ich wiederherzustellen versuchte, war von jeher die der Aneignung eines überlegenen Sinnes" (GW 2, p. 264, Italics added).

There are at least three varieties of circularity: (1) The circle as defect in *argumentation*: since Antiquity, a circle is regarded as a defect in argumentation. If the conclusion of a syllogism appears explicitly or implicitly in the premises, the conclusion does not extend knowledge. In such cases, the conclusion is nothing more than a repetition of what has been already mentioned in the premises. Such an argument is correct, but epistemically worthless. The speaker moves in a circle and in the end she arrives where she started.

- (2) The circle in text *interpretation*: since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, circular structures are discussed in the context of text interpretation (F. Ast, F.D.E. Schleiermacher, A. Boeckh, W. Dilthey). The following formulation gives an illustration of the basic structure:
- (i) The meaning of the single parts p1...pn of a text T cannot be determined without reference to the meaning of the whole text T.
- (ii) The meaning of the whole text T cannot be determined without reference to the meaning of the single parts p1...pn.

This looks like an aporia. But this impression is not justified. Interpretation is a diachronic process proceeding in multiple phases. Many successive readings are required to secure an acceptable and convincing result. Step by step, meanings are ascribed to single parts of a text. At first, the fixation of meaning is worked out hypothetically. After a segment has been determined, the anticipation of the meaning of the text as a whole can be confirmed or rejected or modified. Then the next segment is analysed and a provisional meaning ascribed to it. This procedure will be repeated with every segment of a text. By successive ascriptions of meaning and subsequent modifications of the meaning of the text in its entirety, the final result is obtained. Of course, this is a simple schematization of the complex process of interpretation. If the structure of a text is worked out, the linear segmentation of the text can be refined and adapted to the specificities of the text. The interplay of anticipation of meaning of specific segments of the text and the global meaning of the text as a totality, the corrections and modifications applied on the basis of confirmations or refutations, are basic procedures of text interpretation. And there is nowhere

an aporetic circular structure to be seen. There would be a circle only in the case where interpretation applies no modifications of the initial ascriptions of meaning. Accordingly, (i) and (ii) have to be transformed as follows:

- (i\*) The anticipation of the meaning of text T determines the single successive ascriptions of meaning to parts p1...pn.
- (ii\*) The single successive ascriptions of meaning to parts  $p_1$ ...  $p_n$  determine the meaning of text T.

Epistemic success is essential to all forms of philological interpretation. And there seems to be no aporia threatening the possibility of successful interpretation so far.

(3) Gadamer remarks are based on Heidegger's treatment of the *ontological circle* in *Sein und Zeit*.

Alles vorprädikative schlichte Sehen des Zuhandenen ist an ihm selbst schon verstehend-auslegend [...]. Daß im schlichten Hinsehen die Ausdrücklichkeit eines Aussagens fehlen kann, berechtigt nicht dazu, diesem schlichten Sehen jede artikulierende Auslegung, mithin die Als-Struktur abzusprechen. (SZ, p. 149)<sup>69</sup>

"Understanding" is actualised in perception or in routines of handling and using things (readiness-to-hand). It constitutes the basis for explicitly and reflexively elaborated forms of attribution of meaning. And it is the ontological understanding that is philosophically decisive. It is the primordial way human beings inhabit the world. Gadamer's remarks do not dwell on the categorical difference between Heidegger's fundamental ontology and his own approach; he directly uses Heidegger's conception in the area of text interpretation. Gadamer gives a concise description of the circle in reading and interpreting texts (GW 1, pp. 271–273; TM, pp. 279–281). His conclusion highlights the relevance and indispensability of fore-understanding

<sup>69 &</sup>quot;Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets. [...] The fact that when we look at something, the explicitness of assertion can be absent, does not justify our denying that there is any Articulative [sic] interpretation in such mere seeing, and hence that there is any asstructure in it" (BT, pp. 189–190).

(*Vorverständnis*); that is, anticipations of meaning as well as general presuppositions, background-knowledge, routines, patterns of thought and speech are necessary prerequisites for understanding. There is no unconditioned, presuppositionless understanding. This insight is directed against positivistic conceptions of interpretation, demanding scientific inquiry to proceed without presuppositions. However, at this point, Gadamer's case does not rest on undisputed ground. Epistemically and science-oriented objections describe the fore-understanding as heuristic anticipations that have to be confirmed or refuted by the evidence. Gadamer does not accept this objection.

The conflict can perhaps be made clear by going back to the model of the circle. Whereas the circle discussed above concerns exclusively the text as a whole and its parts, it is possible to extend the frame and take as a starting point of the circular movement the fore-understanding of the interpreter (a), her conceptual resources, her cultural knowledge, her language, her attitudes, normative orientation. With this equipment, the interpreter encounters her text (b). Assuming that there is no immediate complete understanding of the text, the interpreter identifies opaque passages, sentences, words etc. (c) Using methods and routines of her discipline the interpreter tries to solve the problems relying on her fore-understanding (a). The reading of the text can confirm or refute the fore-understanding (a). In case of partial refutation, the fore-understanding (a) is modified and replaced by a variant  $(a_1)$ . Multiple re-readings of the text result in successive modifications of the fore-understanding  $(a_1...a_n)$ . In the end, the meaning of the text is determined as a result of repeated cycles of this process.

In standard circumstances, the process will not come back full circle to the starting point and leave the initial fore-understanding unchanged. The resulting understanding of the text can affect the conceptual resources, the cultural knowledge, the language, the attitudes, the normative orientations of the interpreter. Thus, interpretation can achieve progress in understanding and in knowledge<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> In order to account for the increase of understanding and knowledge, it has been proposed to replace the concept of a hermeneutical circle by a 'spiral of interpretation'; cf. Teichert 2004.

But how should it be possible to recognise that the modifications of pre-understanding and the finally achieved understanding of the text are better off than the initial understanding? How is it possible to say that a reading is better than another, or that an interpretation is correct, acceptable, adequate? For Gadamer, there is no general criterion available to answer this question. Of course, philological and argumentative standards can be used to confirm or criticize an interpretation. Interpretations are not arbitrarily accepted or rejected. And interpretations are articulated inside the scientific community. They are accepted because they articulate the meaning of a text in a way that can be integrated without contradiction or tensions into the understanding of the text by other competent interpreters. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, interpretations are not to be regarded as true or false in the sense of 'true' conceived along the lines of a correspondence theory of truth. Interpretations are adequate, constructive in the sense of solving puzzles and dissolving opacity of meaning. They are not the final, supreme, definitive understanding of the text, but they give access to a better, illuminating understanding. Success in hermeneutical interpretation is gradual. Some interpretations are better than others, none is definitive. Here, Gadamer's concept of dialogue reappears. Interpretations can be regarded as a dialogue between interpreters and texts, and as a contribution to the conversation between interpreters. And this leads to another important moment: interpretation has an ethical dimension. In interpretation the openness of the interpreter is required.

Offenheit für die Meinung des anderen oder des Textes wird gefordert. Solche Offenheit aber schließt immer schon ein, daß man die andere Meinung zu dem Ganzen der eigenen Meinungen in ein Verhältnis setzt oder sich zu ihr. (GW 1, p. 273)<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71 &</sup>quot;All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings and ourselves in relation to it" (TM, p. 281).

This is a very demanding condition, clearly transcending the scientistic view of interpretation. It asks for patience, self-control and the ability to suspend one's own beliefs.

These are convincing points in Gadamer's exposition. However, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics should not be reconstructed by weakening the ontological approach that is central to his concerns. It is not the activity of the individual and the methods it applies but understanding that is philosophically essential, but understanding as *Geschehen*, an uncontrolled, dynamic process actualising understanding. This passive aspect that is disclosed to phenomenological contemplation is a provocation for all science-oriented epistemologies that exclusively turn their attention to the option for methodological improvements and epistemic guarantees for successful interpretation.

Das Verstehen ist selber nicht so sehr als eine Handlung der Subjektivität zu denken, sondern als Einrücken in eine Überlieferungsgeschehen, in dem sich Vergangenheit und Gegenwart beständig vermitteln. Das ist es, was in der hermeneutischen Theorie zur Geltung kommen muß, die viel zu sehr von der Idee eines Verfahrens, einer Methode, beherrscht ist.  $(GW\ 2, p.\ 195)^{72}$ 

To be sure, Gadamer does not defend a hermeneutical fatalism, leaving the helpless individual exposed to an anonymous process of manifestations of sense and meaning. The individual interpreter is active and engages in asking questions and looking for solutions to problems of interpretation. But all this is to be seen within the broader context of conditions that as also enable and restrain the possibilities interpreters can utilise.

<sup>72 &</sup>quot;Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of trans-mission in which past and present are constantly mediated. That is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method" (TM, p. 302).

#### 3. Conclusion

Is it true that Iustinianus closed the philosophical schools at Athens in 529 CE? Is it true that the famous chapter 'Of Identity and Diversity' in John Locke's "Essay on human understanding" was not part of the first edition in 1690, but included as chapter 27 of Book 2 in the second (1694) and subsequent editions?

It certainly does not depend on the interpreter or the interpreter's situation whether answers to these questions are true or false. The ontology of understanding is not helpful to answer such questions. The truth of factual statements cannot be dependent on the hermeneutical situation of individual interpreters, as long as interpretation takes part in scholarship and historical research.

The case is different with respect to questions like "What does it mean that Iustinianus closed the philosophical schools at Athens in 529 CE?" or "What is the meaning of Locke's statements on personal identity in the added chapter?". These questions can be regarded as activating the relation of the interpreter to the interpretandum and are discussed in the dialogues in which competent interpreters are engaged.

Radical critique of philosophical hermeneutics quite often desires to get away from ambiguity by completely reducing interpretation to questions that are answered univocally by true factual statements. This is an unwarranted overreaction and unacceptable simplification .

Gadamer took the intellectual and academic culture that gave a solid basis for interpretation in the form of extensive factual knowledge for granted. Factual truth is not even mentioned by him. Probably, he trusted the institutions to transmit this basis of historical knowledge presupposed without further ado. Here, the situation in the schools and in universities has changed considerably since Gadamer's time. However, it is to be conceded to his critics, that he neglects the positivistic basis of interpretation in a problematic way. It disappears in favor of an exclusive focus on questions of ontological truth.

The final picture, then, is one that accentuates the ambiguities in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics without reducing them unilaterally: ontological truth as disclosure and access to sense and meaning and factual truth in interpretation; understanding as passion or suffering (Geschehen), as a process the interpreter is submitted to and understanding as the result of successful appropriation of historical information as necessary condition for interpretations; dialogue as the interpreter's experience of being addressed by the text and dialogue as an interplay of questions and answers with regard to the meaning of the text.

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# CAPÍTULO IV / CHAPTER IV GADAMER'S METAPHYSICS OF PLAY

Eddo Evink

#### RESUMEN

Gadamer ha realizado análisis muy interesantes del "juego" como metáfora en la ontología del arte. Una lectura atenta de estos pasajes sugiere que esta metáfora no debería restringirse a las obras de arte y a nuestras interpretaciones de ellas. Lo que Gadamer escribe sobre el arte, su ontología y las condiciones humanas de su comprensión, es válido para todo lo que aparece en el mundo y para todo lo que puede ser comprendido mediante la interpretación humana. La noción de "juego" puede así elaborarse hacia una ontología general o metafísica del mundo como horizonte dentro del cual todo aparece. Aunque Gadamer nunca quiso desarrollar tal metafísica general —en consonancia con los esfuerzos de Heidegger por superar la metafísica onto-teológica— su filosofía hermenéutica puede leerse como portadora de presupuestos metafísicos que podrían hacerse explícitos. Este capítulo apunta a tal explicitación de una

metafísica hermenéutica en la que existe una primacía de la historia y el mundo sobre los seres humanos individuales. La idea es que siempre estamos ya inmersos en un juego de relaciones que nunca puede ser completamente abarcado, pero que necesariamente debe presuponerse en todas nuestras acciones y experiencias.

**Palabras clave:** Hans-Georg Gadamer, Juego, Hermenéutica, Metafísica, Ontología, Lenguaje.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Gadamer has given very interesting analyses of "play" as a metaphor in the ontology of art. Close reading of these passages suggests that this metaphor should not be restricted to artworks and our interpretations of them. What Gadamer writes about art, its ontology and the human conditions of its understanding, is valid for everything that appears in the world and for everything that can be understood by human interpretation. The notion of "play" can thus be elaborated towards a general ontology or metaphysics of the world as horizon within which everything appears. Although Gadamer never wanted to develop such a general metaphysics—in line with Heidegger's efforts to overcome onto-theological metaphysics his hermeneutical philosophy can be read as having metaphysical presuppositions that might be made explicit. This chapter aims at such an explication of a hermeneutical metaphysics in which there is a primacy of history and world over individual human beings. The idea is that we are always already caught up in a play of relations that can never be completely surveyed, but that necessarily needs to be presupposed in all our actions and experiences.

**Keywords:** Hans-Georg Gadamer, Play, Hermeneutics, Metaphysics, Ontology, Language.

#### 1. Introduction

There have been many discussions about the metaphysical stature of Gadamer's philosophy. Is his thought metaphysical or not? Does it revert to onto-theology, or does it reach beyond this tradition? What is the status of the claim to universality of his hermeneutics? And how do all these questions relate to his famous and so much quoted adage that being that can be understood, is language? Many divergent answers and interpretations have been given, that participate in the rich and versatile effective history of Gadamer's oeuvre. For a large part these discussions on the presence or absence of metaphysics in Gadamer's work evolve around the meaning of the terms "metaphysics" and "language."

In this chapter I shall develop and defend the thesis that an implicit metaphysics can be found in Gadamer's philosophy, that I would like to label as a metaphysics of the world as play. The explanation of this thesis will mainly focus on Gadamer's magnum opus, Truth and Method (TM). It will start with a discussion of the ontology of the work of art, as Gadamer develops this in the first part of his book, with the notion of 'play' as a guideline. Furthermore, I shall show how the main aspects of this ontology affect the second and third part of the book and how the notion of 'play' recurs in the last section, on the universal aspect of hermeneutics. This discussion will elucidate how 'play' is not only a clue for the ontology of the artwork, but for the whole book, even for Gadamer's entire hermeneutics. Then I shall discuss the terminology of "metaphysics" and "language." This will finally show in what sense Gadamer's idea of play can be taken as a metaphysical position.

# 2. Play as a clue for the ontology of the work of art

Compared to other analyses of play as a cultural phenomenon (Corbineau-Hoffmann, 1995), Gadamer's explication has its own tendency and emphasis. He presents play as a clue or guideline (*Leitfaden*) for an ontological explanation of the work of art. He starts his analysis in *Truth and Method* by explicitly opposing it to the

subjective meaning that play has received in Kant and Schiller and that has since then dominated modern aesthetics and anthropology (TM, p. 102; GW 1, p. 107). The fruitful tension between freedom and regulation, a characteristic of play that is so important for Kant and Fichte, is hardly mentioned by Gadamer, although it is not necessarily foreign or hostile to his approach. Instead, Gadamer does not focus on subjective freedom but on the being of the work of art. It is not the players who are subject of the play, but the play as it manifests itself through the players (TM, p. 103; GW 1, p. 108). This is obviously the main goal of his exposition of all the aspects of play as a key aspect of culture.

Starting with a linguistic approach, referring to the etymology—play originally seems to refer to dance—and to the metaphorical use of the word "play", Gadamer defines its most basic feature: the repeatable to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal, but finds its goals in itself (TM, p. 104; GW 1, p. 109). We can speak of the play of light, of waves, of forces. Since there are no human players involved in these forms of play, we can state, even though Gadamer discusses these playful phenomena in nature as a metaphorical use of the word "play", that the mode of being of play is in principle not even dependent on human players. The primordial sense of play, therefore, is medial. Several elements are mediated in this repeated movement of back and forth. All the other qualities of play are dependent on this primordial sense of a mediating movement.

Gadamer discusses several of these traits, among them the tension between seriousness and jest. A play, as it can be played by humans and other animals, has no goals outside itself, and thus it has a distance from all other everyday activities and their seriousness. There is no reason to play a game besides the reasons of the game itself. Nevertheless, playing a game demands to play it with seriousness, even "sacred seriousness." (TM, pp. 102; GW 1, p. 107) If the rules of the play are not taken seriously, the play is over. A certain doubling and ambiguity in the attitude of the player is related to this tension between playfulness and earnest-

ness. On the one hand a human player knows that she is playing, that she is "only" playing a game or "only" playing a role, that this is in the end "not that important," or "not real." On the other hand, players lose themselves in a play, they can be completely absorbed in it<sup>1</sup>.

The player himself knows that play is only play and that it exists in a world determined by the seriousness of purposes. But he does not know this in such a way that, as a player, he actually *intends* this relation to seriousness. Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in the play. Seriousness is not merely something that calls us away from play; rather, seriousness in playing is necessary to make the play wholly play. (TM, pp. 102–103; GW 1, pp. 107–108)

Gadamer stresses this characteristic of play, since it underscores the primacy of play over the players and their consciousness. He is in agreement with the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, who, in his *Homo ludens*, highlights the connection between innocent games and religious cult. According to both Huizinga and Gadamer, it makes no sense to try to separate religious belief in a cult from a simple play. The point is that this difference itself is dissolved in play (Huizinga 1949).

The seclusion of play from everyday life includes the freedom of the player to play or not to play, and also to make strategic choices within the play. This is the ambiguity between freedom and the rules of the game. Gadamer mentions this last aspect of freedom, the strategic choices, but he barely writes about the first, the decision to play, although it is clearly implied in his analysis. When we play with possibilities or plans, we can always decide not to act

<sup>1</sup> The same doubling is emphasized by Fink 2016. One of his favorite examples is the girl who plays with a doll, for whom the doll is at the same time her daughter and a toy to play with, whereas she is the mother as well as a girl who plays with a doll. Another one of his examples is the actor who is an actor and her character simultaneously—we are looking at Tom Hanks and Forrest Gump at the same time. We might add here playing a sports game for fun, knowing that you play it, or watch it, only for fun, while being extremely fanatic in it at the same time.

according to them; but we do run the risk of being so engrossed in a play that we are outplayed, while the play prevails over us: "One enjoys a freedom of decision which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited." (TM, p. 106; GW 1, p. 112)

Nevertheless, what makes a play human, according to Gadamer, is to freely choose to play a game and to make choices within this play. Choosing within a game, however, is immediately dependent on the rules and ordering of the play:

Apart from these general determining factors, it seems to me characteristic of human play that it plays *something*. That means that the structure of movement to which it submits has a definite quality which the player 'chooses.' First, he expressly separates his playing behavior from his other behavior by *wanting* to play. But even within his readiness to play he makes a choice. He chooses this game rather than that. Correlatively, the space in which the game's movement takes place is not simply the open space in which one 'plays oneself out,' but one that is specially marked out and reserved for the movement of the game. [...] This determines more exactly why playing is always a playing of something. Every game presents the man who plays it with a task. He cannot enjoy the freedom of playing himself out without transforming the aims of his purposive behavior into mere tasks of the game. (TM, p. 107; GW 1, pp. 112–113)

In another text, Gadamer discusses this element of human freedom also as the involvement of human reason within a play:

Now the distinctive thing about human play is its ability to involve our reason, that uniquely human capacity which allows us to set ourselves aims and pursue them consciously, and to outplay this capacity for purposive rationality. For the specifically human quality in our play is the self-discipline and order that we impose on our movements when playing, as if particular purposes were involved just like a child, for example, who counts how often he can bounce the ball on the ground before losing control of it. In this form of nonpurposive activity, it is reason itself that sets the rules. (Gadamer, 1986a, p. 23)

Human freedom is thus subordinate to the structures and rules of the play, while human reason is a shared rationality that structures a play, without being reducible to individual freedom. Humans are not the subjects of play, that is play itself. This is the characteristic of play that is underscored by Gadamer time and again, it is a central feature of his analysis: "All playing is being played. [...] The real subject of the game [...] is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the play itself." (TM, p. 106; GW 1, p. 112)

A play is, hence, not made by its players, it manifests itself. That is its mode of being: self-presentation or self-manifestation (*Selbstdarstellung*)<sup>2</sup> (TM, pp. 103-108; GW 1, pp. 108-113). The acts and choices of the players can only be understood as part of a play, not the other way around. This brings Gadamer to the main goal of his analysis: manifestation is always a presentation for someone, and therefore it can become a presentation for an audience (*Schauspiel*), which is the distinctive aspect of art as play (TM, pp. 108–110; GW 1, pp. 113–115).

Gadamer calls this step from play to a presentation for an audience *Verwandlung ins Gebilde*, which may be translated as transformation into a structure, creation, building or shape. The *Darstellung* or manifestation becomes a presentation for someone. This is not just a change, but a complete transformation. In Gadamer's words, this...

...means that something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with which its earlier being is nil. [...] Thus transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also that what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is the lasting and true. (TM, p. 111; GW 1, pp. 116–117)

In the revised translation of Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, Selbstdarstellung is translated as "self-presentation." This is correct, but I prefer "self-manifestation", because "presentation" may suggest a separation between play as it is and as how it presents itself.

This radical and complete change does not come with a break. Gadamer insists that there is a fluent transition from a ritual dance to a ritual celebration in which a dance is presented, and to a theater play that emanates from such a ritual (he probably refers to the transformation from Dionysian rites to classic Greek tragedy; Gadamer, 1986a, p. 24). This transformation also includes an extension from the play, in the sense that a public is now explicitly included. Spectators are participators, the spell of the play involves them too. To explain this, Gadamer takes his favorite sport, tennis, as an example: "We have only to observe on television the spectators at a tennis match cricking their necks. No one can avoid playing along with the game." (Gadamer, 1986a, p. 24) The movement back and forth thus includes the audience and the public for whom a play is performed. Huizinga saw this as the combination of the two basic aspects, that he distinguished in play: a contest for something and a representation of something (Huizinga, 1949, p. 13). For Gadamer they cannot really be separated, because every play is a self-manifestation (Selbstdarstellung), which, as such, is a presentation for someone.

Play thus becomes a manifestation, but the manifestation is also a play. This is especially clear in the performing arts like music and theater. Gadamer underscores the mediating movement of play, with which he started his analysis. Every performance is a mediation of a play, and even a "total mediation", in the sense that the medium as medium supersedes itself (*sich selbst aufhebt*). (TM, p. 118; GW 1, p. 125) In Gadamer's view, the performance is not about the players, the actors or musicians or about the way they perform. What counts is that the " [...] work presents itself through it and in it." (TM, p. 118; GW 1, p. 125) Again, we can see here how the play itself has a primacy over the players.

In this primacy of the artwork over the players the self-manifestation of the artwork shows its own temporality. All the different performances of a play are unique as well as performances of the same play. The mediating effect of the play is a repeated mediation, both in one performance of the play as in the sequence of performances. In an indissoluble way the manifestation of art and

play "[...] has the character of a repetition of the same. [...] Every repetition is as original as the work itself." (TM, p. 120; GW 1, pp. 127–128) Gadamer explains this temporality with help of the notion of a festival (*Fest*), that is celebrated in regular repetitions that are all unique, but nevertheless find their identity in being exemplars of the same festival. This is what he calls a hermeneutical identity (TM, pp. 121–122; GW 1, pp. 128–129; Gadamer, 1986a, p. 25, pp. 39–53).

The whole explication of play as a guideline for an understanding of the ontology of the artwork is meant by Gadamer as an alternative for the abstractions of modern aesthetics that he labels as the 'aesthetic consciousness'. In modern aesthetics, Gadamer recognizes a focus on either the individual experience of beauty, or on the intentions of the artist, the genius, or on the skills of the performers. All these perspectives are formal abstractions from what Gadamer takes to be the core of the artistic expression and experience: the meaning of the artwork that presents itself in all its temporal manifestations (TM, pp. 77–87; GW 1, pp. 94–106; Gadamer, 1986a, pp. 39–53). The general structure of Gadamer's investigation of the ontology of the artwork can be articulated in a formal way—the repeated back and forth movement that finds its meaning in itself—but it argues against a formal understanding of art. The meaning of an artwork is in the content that it develops in its repeated temporal presentations, in a tradition.

In this analysis of play, that culminates in the play of art and its actual temporal appearances, the general structure of play has a central role. Although his analysis is heading towards a comprehension of art as a cultural phenomenon, Gadamer's approach of art through the concept of play has a wider scope. The metaphorical use of the word "play" is already an indication of this wider scope, and so is the general structure of the recurring to-and-fro movement. There are more clues in Gadamer's oeuvre that extend the purport of his exploration of play beyond the ontology of the work of art, towards an ontology of culture and even, as I shall demonstrate, towards an ontology at all.

# 3. Play as a clue for experience and knowledge

From the start, as we have seen, Gadamer's analysis of play is not restricted to art and its ontology. But also when Gadamer uses the concept of play to understand the essences of art, his inquiries in fact reach further than that. In 'The Relevance of the Beautiful,' he discusses how the art of his time, in the 1970s, could be justified, how it could be understood as art. This includes the question if there is a unity to be found in ancient, medieval and modern experimental art, and finally the unanswerable question how to define art. Gadamer actually is in search of a unity of traditional and modern art. He first tries to find it in a historical survey of several classical and modern terms and ideas, that certainly can give some clarifications; but finally a unified understanding of the art of all ages cannot be found in the traditional aesthetic theories and terminology. Therefore, Gadamer needs to search other ways to look for similarities and unity in ancient and modern art: "Obviously we must have recourse to more fundamental human experiences to help us here. What is the anthropological basis of our experience of art?" (Gadamer, 1986a, p. 22) Gadamer tries to answer this question by describing the human experience of art in the light of the three metaphors of play, symbol and festival. Actually, these metaphors do not only shed a light on the characteristics of art, but also on human experience, which, of course, includes much more than experiencing art. "Play" has thus become a metaphor to understand everything that appears in human experience. In this text the same analysis of "play" is offered as in the section in the first part of *Truth* and Method. There are no remarkable differences. In both texts, "play" is introduced as a metaphor to understand what art is about, how art works, but in fact the scope of the analysis is much broader.

In *Truth and Method*, the broader scope of the analysis of play is quite hidden, for Gadamer does not use the term in large parts of the book. Merely on the last pages of the book the notion of "play" comes to the fore again. But the idea is a clue and guiding thread in the whole book.

The second part of *Truth and Method* extends the findings of the first part to the realm of the humanities. In discussion with his forerunners Schleiermacher, Ranke, Droysen and Dilthey, Gadamer develops a new view of *Verstehen*, the interpretation of texts and other objects of scientific research in the humanities. In line with Heidegger's hermeneutical turn in phenomenology, he states that *Verstehen* is not a method, but a practice in which truth is disclosed. As is well known, Gadamer explains how interpretation takes place as a fusion of horizons, a mingling not only of interpreter and text or object, but also of past and present. Interpretation is a dialogue between reader and text, a back-and-forth movement of questions and answers, in which truth comes to the fore.

What manifests itself in this dialogical movement of disclosure, is not just the intention of the author or the literal meaning of the text, but the *Sache*, that what the text is about, that develops itself through history. Reading and understanding a text is, what Gadamer calls "sich in der Sache verstehen," to find one's way in the matter at stake (TM, p. 294; GW 1, p. 299)<sup>3</sup>. This is the primary meaning of *Verstehen*, all other features and possible goals of understanding are secondary.

The matter at stake is developed in the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the effective history or, literally, the working history of the text. Every interpretation thus participates in an effective history, in a tradition, that manifests itself in all its expressions and interpretations. The tradition feeds the interpreter with a framework of references, a horizon of meaning that functions as a departure point for a dialogue that participates in a larger conversation, in which the same tradition extends itself. Just as a play manifests itself in all the movements of the players, a *Sache*, idea or theme manifests itself in dialogues in which the interpreters can make their moves. In short, play is the model for Gadamer's understanding of how the

<sup>3 &</sup>quot;Sich in der Sache verstehen" is hard to translate in English. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall have translated it as "to understand the content of what is said."

humanities work, play is the model for the disclosure of truth by way of *Verstehen*.

Gadamer also describes the dialogue of understanding in terms of dialectics. The dialectical movement of back and forth is adopted in his hermeneutical understanding of interpretation and conceptualization, but with an important difference: rational reflection can never elevate itself above the effective history in which it participates. The finitude and contextuality of all understanding precludes any Hegelian superseding (*Aufhebung*) that would reduce the historicity of understanding to fixed concepts (TM, pp. 336–334; GW 1, pp. 346–352).

# 4. Play as a clue for appearing and for ontology as such

A further extension of this model is achieved in the third and last part of *Truth and Method*, where Gadamer elaborates on a hermeneutical ontology. Just as play was the clue, guideline or *Leitfaden* for the ontological explanation of art, in a comparable way, language is presented as the *Leitfaden* for the ontological turn of hermeneutics. Understanding someone is "[...] to come to an understanding of the subject matter..." by language (*sich in der Sprache Verständigen*), and therefore, in the third part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer wants to state that the whole process of understanding is verbal, linguistic (*daß dieser ganze Vorgang ein sprachlicher ist*) (TM, p. 385; GW 1, p. 387). Language is the medium for what he calls the "hermeneutical experience," it determines what can be understood and how it is understood<sup>4</sup>.

Step by step Gadamer explains what the profound linguistic character of understanding implies. To start with, what is understood, is articulated in language. Our knowledge and understanding of the world finally finds its articulation in written language. The knowledge and self-understanding of a tradition develops itself through texts.

<sup>4</sup> See also TM (p. 370; GW 1, p. 383): "[...] the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language."

Thus written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing is self-alienation. Overcoming it, reading the text, is thus the highest task of understanding. [...] In writing, language gains its true ideality, for in encountering a written tradition understanding consciousness acquires its full sovereignty. (TM, p. 392; GW 1, p. 394)

Not only the object of understanding is determined by language, also its performance in the hermeneutic act is linguistic. There is no understanding without language. Gadamer knows very well that we often cannot find the words to express the beauty of a painting or a special experience. There is finitude in what we can say by language. But we can only express this finitude in language itself. If words fall short, we express that by words. The fundamental priority of language does not mean that we can always find the right words, but it does mean that there is always the possibility to find new words. The finitude of our utterings is mirrored in the infinite dimension of language.

Because of this mirroring, Gadamer speaks of the speculative character of the medium of language. Saying something does not only mean to refer to something or to make a statement. Words can mirror themselves in a doubling that leads beyond a single statement and makes different meanings possible. The meaning of words can never be fixed. No one can control language or one's own expressions. The language that is spoken, the word that is uttered, is always more than just that; it is related to an inner meaning, a verbum interius that remains unsaid. Such an utterance "...is speculative in that the finite possibilities of the word are oriented toward the sense intended as toward the infinite." (TM, pp. 464; GW 1, p. 473) Jean Grondin has explained this speculative trait of language in words that recall the core of the notion of play: "The speculative nature of language refers to this constant interplay, back and forth, between the said and the unsaid, which is a universal element of our linguistic experience." (Grondin 2022, p. 30)

<sup>5</sup> For an explanation of the crucial role of the idea of *verbum interius* in Gadamer's work, see also Grondin 1994, (pp. xiii–xv, 122–123); Grondin 1995 (p. x).

Understanding in and by language, therefore, is more than making statements or propositions. Language takes place in living dialogues, it cannot definitely be frozen into static concepts. Conceptual language always needs to be revived into living language by interpretation. In the lecture that initiated his remarkable debate with Derrida, Gadamer describes his own contribution to hermeneutics as "...the discovery that no conceptual language [...] represents an unbreakable constraint upon thought. [...] Everything that goes under the name of language always refers beyond that which achieves the status of a proposition." (Gadamer 1989a, pp. 23, 25)

The medium of language, however, not only functions as a mediation between people in dialogue, or a mediation between reader and text. In that case the play of interpretation would be too formal again. Language mediates what it tries to say, it is about something, and this what-it-is-about, the *Sache*, is what expresses itself in language. "Verbal form and traditionary content cannot be separated in the hermeneutic experience." (TM, p. 438; GW 1, p. 445) Language and tradition thus form a unity. This means that every language is an expression of a culture and a world. World and language are dependent on each other.

Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature. [...] Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. (TM, p. 440; GW 1, pp. 446–447)

There are many languages that can be translated into each other, and accordingly, there are different cultural worlds that may engage with each other. Such a translation and engagement are possible because every world is a human and linguistically constituted world, open for renewal. Languages are thus, in the expression of Wilhelm von Humboldt, worldviews, *Weltansichten* (TM, pp. 437–440; GW 1, pp.

443–447). Every language is the medium in which worlds and traditions are rendered to new generations. Different cultures are not separated by barriers, but principally open to each other.

An important aspect of the linguistic mediation of worlds is that the idea of a "world in itself" has become problematic. We have no access to a world in itself beyond the finite historical and cultural worldviews. Instead of a "world in itself" (*Welt an sich*), we only have a "view" of the world (*Ansicht der Welt*).

Those views of the world are not relative in the sense that one could oppose them to the 'world in itself,' as if the right view from some possible position outside the human, linguistic world could discover it in its being-in-itself. [...] It is the whole to which linguistically schematized experience refers. The multiplicity of these worldviews does not involve any relativization of the 'world'. Rather, the world is not different from the views in which it represents itself. (TM, p. 444; GW 1, p. 451)

This elaboration of Gadamer on linguistic mediation of the world can be seen as a deepening of the above mentioned idea that language moves beyond pure propositions. There is nothing we can say about an "object in itself," we only have access to objects through their constitution in language. This is even more valid for the world. We cannot survey the world as a whole, we are always in the midst of the world as it is given in a specific worldview, within a specific language. Contrary to other objects, this is the most encompassing idea we can have. The world cannot appear as an object, it is the context within which objects can appear, it is their condition of possibility. What Gadamer writes about understanding and language—"What is true of understanding is just as true of language. [...] Neither is ever simply an object but instead comprehends everything that can ever be an object." (TM, p. 405; GW 1, p. 408) —is a *fortiori* also true for the world, because the world can only present itself as world in language, that is, in a specific language. This linguistic experience of the world is "absolute", it is not relative in regard to an alleged "world in itself" (TM, pp. 446–447; GW 1, p. 453):

We have, then, a confirmation of what we stated above, namely that in language the world itself presents itself. Verbal experience of the world is 'absolute.' It transcends all the relative ways being is posited, because it embraces all being-in-itself, in whatever relationships (relativities) it appears. Our verbal experience of the world is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing. That language and world are related in a fundamental way does not mean, then, that world becomes the object of language. Rather, the object of knowledge and statements is always already enclosed within the world horizon of language. (TM, pp. 446–447; GW 1, pp. 454–455)

What does it mean that the world is 'absolute'? It means that all knowledge and every appearance must presuppose the world as a context in which it can be known or appear. Like language and understanding, worldliness is a necessary condition of possibility of anything. They are inescapable, and thus universal; building blocks of what Gadamer, in the last section of *Truth and Method*, calls the universal aspect of hermeneutics. A consequence of this is that the world and language as a whole, cannot themselves appear as object. They are preconditions of all objectivity. The very concept of an "absolute object", therefore, is a contradiction in terms (TM, p. 448; GW 1, p. 455).

The scrupulous explanations by Gadamer of how all appearing can only occur within the bounds of understanding, language and worldliness, all follow the model of play, as I have described above. They are historical frameworks within which all that appears is inscribed and that cannot be surveyed, fixed or controlled. They are horizons in which humans participate, like players in a game, without being subject of the game, because the play of understanding, language and worldliness is itself subject. Human subjects and their situated understandings are finite, but the play of world and language is infinite and universal.

In addition, Gadamer takes his explanation a step further, by relating the infinity and universality of language to the universality of reason: "Its universality keeps pace with the universality of reason." (TM, p. 402; GW 1, p. 405) He even seems to equate language and reason: "Language is the language of reason itself." (TM, p. 402; GW 1, p. 405) This implies that, on the one hand, every example of rational understanding is finite and contextual, and that, on the other hand, language and rationality are structurally infinite. With this step Gadamer aligns with an old metaphysical principle, the principle of sufficient reason—nihil est sine ratione—that states that everything in principle can be understood. But he takes it up within a hermeneutical framework, and that changes the principle. The universality and infinity of reason does not imply anymore that anything is or will be explainable. It means that in principle everything is open for reason, nothing is in advance closed for rational understanding. Hermeneutical claims for universality and infinity are always linked to contextuality and finitude: since everything is contextual, there will inevitably be new finite contexts. Language, reason and understanding will always have a next chance.

The last step in Gadamer's explanation of the fundamental linguistic characteristics of hermeneutics completes its ontological turn, as was announced in the title of the third part<sup>6</sup>. His thesis on the universal aspect of hermeneutics includes a statement on Being. We have seen how the model of play has directed Gadamer's reflections to the conviction that knowledge and understanding, the "hermeneutical phenomenon", take place within language, which originally mediates between humans and the world, and that

I present the different aspects of Gadamer's explanation as several steps in a deepening of the same movement of thought, from art through the historicity of understanding to the ontological turn of hermeneutics. Jean Grondin has discerned more or less the same moments as four versions of the thesis of the universality of hermeneutics: 1) a broadening of hermeneutics beyond methodology of the humanities; 2) the canonical version: a universal thesis on the linguistic dimension of understanding; 3) a corollary of the second version: the universality of language is equal to the universality of reason and knows no limits; 4) the universality of hermeneutics is grounded in a fundamental constitution of Being (Grondin, 2022).

this mediation is guided by the *Sache* that expresses itself in the historical development of a tradition. Now, at the end of his thorough studies, he states that this movement, in which things come to language and are understood, reveals a universal ontological structure: all Being makes itself known through language. This is how Gadamer, in the first lines of the last section of his book, reaches the culmination of his philosophical hermeneutics as well as his most quoted phrase:

Our inquiry has been guided by the basic idea that language is a medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together. [...] In all the cases we analyzed, [...] the speculative structure of language emerged, not as the reflection of something given but as the coming into language of a totality of meaning. [...] This activity of the matter at stake [Dieses Tun der Sache] is the real speculative movement that takes hold of the speaker. [...] We can now see that this activity of the matter at stake, the coming into language of meaning, points to a universal ontological structure, namely to the basic nature of everything toward which understanding can be directed. Being that can be understood is language. (TM, pp. 469–470; GW 1, p. 478, translation slightly changed)

Everything we can know and understand from reality, comes to us in the mode of language. Our understanding is always guided by the movement of structured elements in reality that, in speculative movements, manifest themselves to us and find their articulation in language. Tradition, world, language, they are all structural, dialectic and speculative movements, to-and-fro, in which human speakers, writers and readers participate like players in a game. This model of play, that was first introduced as the ontology of the work of art, then implicitly as the historical constitution of knowledge in the humanities, now turns out to be the universal pattern for all knowledge of the whole of reality:

Speculative language, distinguishing itself from itself, presenting itself [sich darstellend], language that expresses meaning is not only art and history but everything insofar as it can be understood. The speculative

character of being that is the ground of hermeneutics has the same universality as do reason and language. (TM, p. 472; GW 1, p. 480)

Being, knowing and language are thus taken together, interwoven, as mutually interdependent, and therefore basically one unity. Gadamer seems to elaborate here on a hermeneutical version of the metaphysical identity thesis: Being and knowledge are the same. Famous expressions of this identity thesis can be found in Parmenides and in Hegel. Gadamer's hermeneutical-phenomenological variant would be that we can only know beings thanks to their appearing to us, and they can only appear through their self-manifestation in the effective history in which knowledge participates. Rational understanding cannot elevate itself above this effective history by a Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The identity of Being and knowing, therefore, cannot rise up to a complete conceptual understanding; all understanding remains dependent on its historical articulations.

In the last section on the universality of hermeneutics Gadamer again relies on the metaphysical tradition to explain how speculative self-manifestation forms the heart of the hermeneutical understanding of Being. He describes the metaphysical concept of the beautiful in order to show how the features of beauty shine through all Being. Playing on the close proximity in German of shining (scheinen) and appearing (erscheinen), Gadamer describes how Being itself appears through the radiation of its beauty. Beauty makes itself manifest and through beauty Being makes itself manifest. Like his hermeneutical appropriation of dialectics in a historical contextual frame, Gadamer now builds on this long metaphysical tradition of beauty to highlight the belonging together of Being and understanding. He underscores two features that are shared by the metaphysical notion of beauty and the hermeneutical understanding of Being.

First, they both have the character of an event, inscribed in a context: "The event of the beautiful and the hermeneutical process both presuppose the finiteness of human life." (TM, p. 480; GW 1, p. 489) Secondly, both show how truth can only come to the fore through the movement of self-manifestation. This can be

shown, Gadamer writes, "if we start from the basic ontological view that being is *language—i.e.*, *self-presentation*—as revealed to us by the hermeneutical experience of being." (TM, p. 481; GW 1, p. 490) In this quote four things come together: being is language, is self-manifestation, is the core of the notion of play. It is not surprising, hence, that on the last pages of his book, Gadamer returns to the metaphor of play: "What we mean by truth here can best be defined again in terms of our concept of *play*." (TM, p. 483; GW 1, p. 493) He then describes the proximity of play and language through the notion of a play with words, but explains this wordplay as a way in which language plays with the humans who speak and listen:

Here it is worth recalling what we said about the nature of play, namely that the player's actions should not be considered subjective actions, since it is, rather, the game itself that plays, for it draws the players into itself and thus itself becomes the actual subjectum of the playing. (TM, p. 484; GW 1, p. 493)

The concept of play thus captures the core of Gadamer's hermeneutics, in his understanding of art, history, language, reason and finally in the ontological turn of hermeneutics, in his view on Being. Being can only be known through events that are part of a self-asserting movement in which meaning manifests itself. Humans are captivated by this movement of self-presenting meaning and Being:

Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself. So it is well founded for us to use the same concept of play for the hermeneutical phenomenon as for the experience of the beautiful. When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us. It has asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to test the claim to meaning that it makes. What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth of play about it. (TM, p. 484; GW 1, p. 494)

In conclusion, the metaphor of play makes us see how we are always immersed in movements of Being and their expressions in language and understanding. These movements cannot be fixed or controlled by a foundation, origin or ultimate goal. All experience and knowledge consists of finite elements within infinite contexts.

# 5. Language

Taking the concept of play as a guide for reading *Truth and Method* gave us a clue how to understand what Gadamer tried to say with the famous quote "Being that can be understood is language." But it still needs to be clarified, what exactly Gadamer means with "language." At least three things must be said about Gadamer's ideas of language.

First, Gadamer does not see language as a simple tool we can use, nor as a set of concepts that need to be defined as strictly as possible. Language is first of all a set of vivid, changing and versatile structures, in which humans can live together. Language is the basis of and reconstitutes itself in everyday dialogues, stories and mutual understanding. The exactness of scientific language is very important and useful, but it is an abstraction from everyday language and not its norm. Scientific and technical terminology always need to be translated back to everyday language, to the living dialogues in which no one has the first or last word and in which concepts can thus never be completely fixed. Interpretation consists of bringing concepts and propositions to live again. In Gadamer's own words: "It is true that the way goes 'from word to concept,' but we must also be able to move 'from concept to word,' if we wish to reach the other person." (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 11)

Secondly, in several passages Gadamer seems to give a very broad meaning to the word "language." He sometimes equates being, language and self-manifestation: "being is *language – i.e.*, *self-presentation –.*" (TM, p. 481; GW 1, p. 488) He explicitly extends the meaning of 'language' by projecting it back on Being, immediately after the famous quote:

Being that can be understood is language. The hermeneutical phenomenon here projects its own universality back onto the ontological constitution of what is understood, determining it in a universal sense as language and determining its own relation to beings as interpretation. Thus we speak not only of a language of art but also of a language of nature—in short, of any language that things have. (TM, p. 470; GW 1, p. 478)

If we speak of the language of nature and the language of things, then "language" is clearly a broader term than in its everyday use, it indeed becomes the same as self-presentation, self-manifestation, sich darstellen. We can add here that "language" in such a broad sense also stands for "the language of music," "the language of art," "the language of animals," and so on.

But, thirdly, Gadamer also makes movements in the other direction. In many passages "language" is only used in its usual everyday meaning, not in the broader sense. A few pages above, I quoted this passage: "In writing, language gains its true ideality, for in encountering a written tradition understanding consciousness acquires its full sovereignty." (TM, p. 392; GW 1, p. 394) "True ideality" and "full sovereignty" suggest a hierarchy of different sorts of language. Written texts and conceptual language that give shape to exact understanding, seem to receive a higher value than other non-linguistic expressions, at least in the context of understanding. Moreover, when Gadamer writes about the relation of language to the ineffable, stating that we relate by language to experiences that escape understanding by language, "language" in the usual sense is given a central place, in which all other "non-linguistic languages" can come together.

Perhaps, the focus on understanding that is clearly present in *Truth and Method*, creates such a hierarchy. Being can only be understood when beings manifest themselves (language in the broad sense), and this understanding reaches a higher level in language (in the usual, stricter sense) than in, e.g., images or music. Ima-

ges and music may be used, but they are in need of language to be combined in understanding.

### 6. Metaphysics

Is this philosophical position of *Truth and Method*, understood in terms of play, a metaphysical position? Opinions differ on this matter. On the one hand, Gadamer himself writes:

The universality of the hermeneutical perspective is all-encompassing. I once formulated this idea by saying that being that can be understood is language. *This is certainly not a metaphysical assertion*. Instead, it describes, from the medium of understanding, the unrestricted scope possessed by the hermeneutical perspective. (Gadamer, 1976, p. 103, emphasis added)

On the other hand, Jean Grondin states:

The universality claim of understanding, reason and language is here grounded in Being. This is a *most metaphysical thesis* in which one can view the apex of the universality claim of hermeneutics. (Grondin, 2022, p. 33, emphasis added)

Being confronted with these opposing statements, it would be helpful if we could find some clarity about the meaning of the term "metaphysics." Of course there have been many ways in which the term 'metaphysics' has been used, but for now, in the limited space that is left in this article, it might be clarifying to make a distinction between two meanings of "metaphysics." This term can refer to (1) the realm of questions that was labeled by Aristotle as "first philosophy," in the collection of his texts that later received the title "Metaphysics," that is the domain of the most basic and most general questions, or in other words, the domain of questions about universal, necessary and inescapable presuppositions. The term can also refer to (2) the traditional sort of answers to these questions of first philosophy. The answers were given in fixed concepts of principles,

foundations, origins or other final terms, like *ousia*, idea, God, subject, consciousness, spirit, and so on.

This search for stable essences and principles is the metaphysical tradition that Heidegger called onto-theology. Heidegger first wanted to dismantle this tradition in his *Destruktion* of the history of ontology. Later he tried to overcome this tradition by looking for a new beginning of philosophy, with a new language. This turned out to be an infinite task, for philosophy tended to fall back to the language of this metaphysical tradition, the so-called "language of metaphysics," again and again.

Derrida went a step further by stating that philosophy has a necessary tendency towards onto-theology or 'metaphysics of presence,' that is then disrupted by the uncontrollable and undermining effects of language, shown and performed by deconstruction. Derrida recognized a metaphysical tendency in Gadamer's work, in his efforts to find coherent meaning in hermeneutical understanding. Such coherence would inevitably presuppose a metaphysical system based on a secure and lasting principle. In other words, Gadamer would not be aware of the "language of metaphysics" he was using.

Gadamer, however, disagrees with this critique, and also with the whole idea of a "language of metaphysics." He calls this " [...] a poor inexact expression. There is no language of metaphysics." (Gadamer, 1989e, p. 121) He does not recognize a tendency to metaphysical thinking in language, on the contrary, conceptual language can and must always be traced back to living dialogue. Again, " [...] there is no language of metaphysics. There is only a metaphysically thought-out coinage of concepts that have been lifted from living speech." (Gadamer, 1989d, p. 107; cf. Gadamer, 2007a; Keane, 2022)

Instead, the understanding Gadamer is looking for in all interpretation, is an effort to revive such living speech, it is not a violent effort to seize and control the meaning of a text. Looking back at his strange debate with Derrida, he writes: "I really would like to know what understanding [...] has to do with metaphysics."

(Gadamer, 1989c, p. 96) According to Gadamer, this accusation by Derrida is a sign of Derrida's own presupposition that metaphysical efforts of identification and reduction of otherness are the effect of a tendency in all language that is used in philosophy:

Now Derrida would object by saying that understanding always turns into appropriation and so involves a covering-up of otherness. [...] Yet it seems to me that to make an assumption that such identification occurs within understanding is to disclose a position that is idealistic and logocentric, one we had already left behind after World War I in our revisions and criticisms of idealism... (Gadamer, 1989e, p. 119; cf. Gadamer, 2007b, p. 388)<sup>7</sup>

Gadamer gives another turn to Heidegger's notion of *Destruktion*, changing it in a reconstruction of the development of metaphysical conceptual terminology, that has to be turned back to the living language it was derived from: "The goal of *Destruktion* is to let the concept speak again in its interwovenness in living language. This is a hermeneutical task. It has nothing to do with obscure talk of origin and of the original." (Gadamer, 1989c, p. 100; cf. Gadamer, 1989d, p. 107)<sup>8</sup>.

Having this debate of Gadamer with both Heidegger and Derrida in mind, Gadamer's insistence that his statement "Being that can be understood is language" is *not* metaphysical, does not come as a surprise. Indeed, this assertion does not call for a principle, origin or other strong metaphysical concept. It is exactly a plea for the opposite. Gadamer's hermeneutics, in short, is not metaphysics in the second meaning of the word.

But is does claim universal validity for the hermeneutical point of view that Being manifests itself in effective histories in which

<sup>7</sup> In the same text Gadamer writes: "[...] it looks to me like a sheer misunderstanding for Derrida to see the metaphysics of presence here at work. His starting point in the Platonic-static sense of an ideal meaning has, it seems, led him into this misunderstanding." (Gadamer, 1989e, p. 118)

<sup>8</sup> For a comparison between Gadamer and Derrida and a discussion of their debate, see also Evink 2022.

every author and interpreter is always rooted and immersed. This "universal aspect of hermeneutics" is presented as an unavoidable presupposition of every reflection and interpretation, of all humanities and philosophy. Such a claim can be counted as belonging to the domain of first philosophy and is clearly metaphysical in the first meaning of the word.

This distinction can also be found in Gadamer's own thoughts on the relation between language and world. Every language includes a worldview (Ansicht der Welt), but a "world in itself" (Welt an sich) cannot be found. World and language both can never appear as an object, because all objectification takes place in the context of language and world. There is an inescapable worldliness in all our understanding, but this cannot be secured into a metaphysical concept of world that would transcend all contextual linguistic articulations. Such a metaphysical concept would be an example of metaphysics in the second sense, whereas the claim of worldliness as an inevitable but ungraspable contextuality can be counted as a metaphysical statement in the first sense.

# 7. Conclusion: A metaphysical concept of play

The concept of play, as Gadamer has explored it, has the benefit of referring to worldliness and contextuality without being nailed down to an established concept of an object. In our relationship to the world we are like players in a complex play, endlessly figuring out how it needs to be played. As a claim of universal validity this is a metaphysical concept or metaphor that escapes the rigidity of onto-theological principles. We always find ourselves in contexts—cultural, political, historical, linguistic, etc. contexts—in which we strategically try to find our way, responding to what has preceded us and presents itself to us. We can try to step out of such a context and reflect on it, but that is only possible within a new context, in relation to new players and circumstances. There is no way to transcend these plays and contexts as such.

The metaphor of play can be compared with this other metaphor that has a rich history in phenomenology and hermeneutics, and of which Gadamer has also given a beautiful analysis: the horizon. We are always embedded in horizons, without being able to get a grip on them, because they always move with us. It is, again, possible to reflect on the horizons in which we live, but every reflection presupposes a new vantage point and horizon, and there is no way to rise above all possible horizons (Evink, 2010; 2013).

Play and horizon are metaphors that articulate the hermeneutical condition of human life, without being frozen into static concepts. Play is, in conclusion, a metaphorical concept that captures Gadamer's philosophy as a metaphysics beyond onto-theology.

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# SEGUNDA SECCIÓN SECOND PART

RAZÓN, SIGNIFICADO Y CIENCIA REASON, MEANING, AND SCIENCE

# CAPÍTULOV / CHAPTER V

# GADAMER AND NIETZSCHE ONTHE QUESTION OF SCIENCE: 'THE VICTORY OF SCIENTIFIC METHOD OVER SCIENCE'

Babette Babich

#### **RESUMEN**

Comenzando con una discusión sobre Gadamer en torno a la ciencia considerada a través de la tradición de la filología clásica del siglo XIX, incluyendo a Nietzsche, este ensayo revisa la cuestión de la ciencia y las matemáticas y la "crisis" para la fenomenología hermenéutica de Husserl y Heidegger. Lo que está en juego es la invención galileana del objeto en la nueva ciencia y, por ende, la transformación de la ciencia y el conocimiento junto con el rol de las matemáticas y el "método científico". A lo largo del texto resulta crucial el papel del preguntar.

**Palabras clave:** Filología clásica, hermenéutica literaria/material, Nietzsche, Wigner, Heelan.

#### ABSTRACT

Beginning with a discussion of Gadamer on science considered via the 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition of classical philology including Nietzsche, this essay reviews the question of science and mathematics and the 'crisis' for Husserl and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. At stake is Galileo's invention of the object in the new science and thereby the transformation of science and knowing along with the role of mathematics and the 'scientific method.' Crucial throughout is the role of questioning.

**Keywords:** Classical philology, literary/material hermeneutics, Nietzsche, Wigner, Heelan.

...it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.

—Aristotle

It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our 19<sup>th</sup> century but the victory of scientific method over science.

—Nietzsche

#### 1. Introduction

A discussion of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Friedrich Nietzsche is perforce a discussion of their shared formation in classical or ancient philology and at issue for both are questions of science and method. To this extent, so Fred Lawrence explains, one has to orient oneself in reading Gadamer, not only mindful of the Hegelian and neo-Kantian tradition but also of "Heideggerian motifs" whilst remaining cognizant of Gadamer's scrupulous dedication "to dis-

cern the Aristotle in Plato and to see the Plato in Aristotle" (1981, p. xv). Another approach might focus (as Gadamer does) on Hegel and science, yet the focus on Aristotle is crucial as Gadamer tells us, as Facundo Bey highlights this recollection that Gadamer read Heidegger's "sixty-page typewritten text ... preceded by the title Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles ('Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle')" (Bey, 2024, p. 76). Key here is antiquity and its conception of science as this differs as Gadamer emphasizes this (as Heidegger emphasizes this) from our modern conception of "science." For Gadamer, "The expression empirical science would have struck the Greek ear like a sounding brass" (1981, p. 5). If we today, not least after the last four years and its dedication to a certain idolization of science as 'the' science, may find Gadamer's distinction challenging, it is essential to Gadamer's recognition that hermeneutics belongs to the methodological process and progress of science as such. For Gadamer, and below I will have cause to speak in this hermeneutic connection of Nietzsche's 'Love as 'artifice' [Kunstgriff]," at stake is a "Kunstlehre (a teaching about a technical skill or know how)," i.e., "a translation of the Greek techne" whereby philosophy is both such a know-how and a science in a lineage with "the kind of science that for the Greeks was the model of theoretic knowledge (ἐπιστήμη): mathematics" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 89).

I have argued that it is illuminating to examine Nietzsche's claim that the 19<sup>th</sup> century is characterized less by the victory of scientific method than the victory of method as such over science<sup>1</sup> (KSA 13, p. 442). This in turn requires a review of the role of mathematics and of the 'crisis' for Husserl and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, including the hermeneutic phenomenology of the physicist-philosopher, Patrick Aidan Heelan [1926–2015] and Paul Feyerabend on "method." At stake is Galileo's invention of the object in the new science and thereby transformation of sci-

<sup>1</sup> See for discussion, including an etymological discussion of science / Wissenschaft, Babich 2007.

ence and knowing along with the role of mathematics and the "scientific method."

#### 2. Gadamer and Truth and Method

Unchanging truth is the province of mathematics as Gadamer explains the importance of invariance: "only where something is unchangeable can we have knowledge of it without having to take another look from time to time" (1998, p. 60). Since Galileo, for Gadamer, science presumes a mathematical

concept of method, and its primacy over the subject matter: the objects of science are defined by the conditions of methodical knowability. This raises the question of what kind of science the *humaniora* [...] these sciences of human affairs that we call the *Geisteswissenschaften*, could be under these circumstances. (1998, p. 51)

Decisive for a hermeneutic philosophy of science in the ambit of Husserl's 'life world' and given Heidegger's 'hermeneutics of facticity' <sup>2</sup> Gadamer argues that

it is theory that really determines and confirms the actual epistemic value of established facts. The mere accumulation of facts constitutes no experience at all, let alone the foundation of empirical science. It is the 'hermeneutic' relationship between fact and theory that is decisive in this field too. (1998, p. 53)<sup>3</sup>

Citing the first sentence of Kant's first Critique, Gadamer highlights contingency, acknowledged, philosophically, incontrovertibly so, such that as opposed, as noted at the outset to Plato or Aristotle, today "by the word 'science' we now quite self-evidently understand empirical science" (1998, p. 126).

<sup>2</sup> Gadamer defines the 'hermeneutics of facticity as "confronting the intrinsic incomprehensibility of factical Dasein" (1998, p. 55).

<sup>3</sup> See Heelan 2016.

It is thus with reference to science so understood that Gadamer began *Truth and Method* by distinguishing the natural sciences from the human sciences or *Geisteswissenschaften*, the same distinction that compelled Kant to raise the question of whether it might one day be possible to set metaphysics on the certain (unchanging) path of a science, a question which also presupposed limit:

The epoch-making result of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was not only that it destroyed metaphysics as a purely rational science of the world, the soul, and God, but that, at the same time, it revealed an area within which the use of *a priori* concepts is justified and which makes knowledge possible. *The Critique of Pure Reason* not merely destroyed the dreams of a seer; it also answered the question of how pure science is possible. (1989, p. 215)

The contemporary force of Gadamer's reflections succeed Heidegger's critical reflections on science and technology. Driving two world wars and a still ongoing postwar/war-freighted epoch, modern technoscience transforms what it is to be human. Thus Gadamer reflects that

All natural relationships have been fundamentally altered by the technical Age's faith in science. Science governs through the society of experts. It is behind the global industrialization brought about by the world economy, it is behind the "electronic war," and Christianity has come to an end now that its secularized forms have suppressed the nihilism whose rise Nietzsche clear-sightedly prophesied. (1998, p. 75)<sup>4</sup>

In the closing sections of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche argued that the Copernican shift that displaced humanity from the centre constituted what he called 'the latest form' of the 'old ascetic ideal' quite as Gadamer can remind us here that "if the concept of

<sup>4</sup> Thereby Gadamer highlights the radical newness of "the new science that, for all its connections with ancient science, became something quite new and ushered in the new epoch" (1998, pp. 75–76).

<sup>5</sup> See for discussion of this claim, Babich 2014.

science changed fundamentally during this period, then this also had a theological basis" (1998, p. 76).

For the Greeks, what counts as knowable are ideas. But for what Gadamer names the 'new science' there is both the application, post-Galileo, of "the new language of mathematics to observation" and consequently "a new projection of what it means to know that impelled the new science" (1998, p. 76).

Facts are contingent, that is mutable, subject to empirical circumstance, variation, perspective, contextual situation. Thus Gadamer reflects on the transformation of what counts as science:

It cannot be denied that the new empirical science with its new ideal of method, applying mathematical projections to nature and natural processes, brought a new tension into the world between language and knowledge. It is clear—and one cannot penetrate this question deeply enough—that at bottom the concept of an empirical science has paradoxical connotations for the tradition from which our civilization developed. Science that needs only experience in order to be true! (1998, p. 126)

Here to understand this point with respect to mathematics as such it can be worth revisiting Eugene Wigner's 1959 "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences." A lecture presented for a college audience, Wigner began with a joke his student auditors might relate to:

There is a story about two friends, who were classmates in high school, talking about their jobs. One of them became a statistician and was working on population trends. He showed a reprint to his former classmate. The reprint started, as usual, with the Gaussian distribution and the statistician explained to his former classmate the meaning of the symbols for the actual population, for the average population, and so on. His classmate was a bit incredulous and was not quite sure whether the statistician was pulling his leg. "How can you know that?" was his query. "And what is this symbol here?" "Oh," said the statistician, "this is  $\pi$ ." "What is that?" "The ratio of the circumference of the circle to its diameter." "Well, now you are pushing your joke too far,"

said the classmate, "surely the population has nothing to do with the circumference of the circle." (Wigner, 1960, p. 1)

Wigner's anecdote demonstrates that, with the right "rhetorical" dressing, the obscure can seem perfectly clear even to a non-initiate, a non-statistician. Thus, as he tells his joke, even assuming his auditors are not statisticians, they act as if they understand the reference: "The reprint started, as usual, with the Gaussian distribution." The point of the joke gives us Wigner seeing through the interlocutor's flatfooted limitations to his baffled punchline: "surely the population has nothing to do with the circumference of the circle." Wigner proceeds to confess his own disquiet (gently summarizing the "necessary incompleteness" of the axiomatic method and pointing out a corollary) relating a question from one of his Princeton students (identified as "FWerner") who asked:

How do we know that, if we made a theory which focusses its attention on phenomena we disregard and disregards some of the phenomena now commanding our attention, that we could not build another theory which has little in common with the present one but which, nevertheless, explains just as many phenomena as the present theory. (1960, p. 1)

This is the very challenge Nietzsche poses in Jenseits von Gut und Böse §22 to his Messieurs Physicists [Meine Herren Physiker], i.e., natural scientists collectively regarded, writing in his Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future contrasting/disambiguating the notion of law (in society) and law (in physics) (KSA 5, p. 37). Nietzsche's point concerns our conventionally equivocal use of law and our expectation that nature is obliged to 'obey' the "law" quite as we ourselves are, invoking the possibility of an alternate hypothesis which would, just as in the case of the question Wigner recalls, "save the phenomena" but without presupposing "law" per se, here to quote Nietzsche's counterpoint:

somebody might come along, who, with opposite intentions and modes of interpretation, could read out of the same "Nature," and with regard to the same phenomena, just the tyrannically inconsiderate and relentless enforcement of the claims of power—an interpreter who should so place the unexceptionalness and unconditionalness of all "Will to Power" before your eyes, that almost every word, and the word "tyranny" itself, would eventually seem unsuitable, or like a weakening and softening metaphor—as being too human; and who should, nevertheless, end by asserting the same about this world as you do, namely, that it has a "necessary" and "calculable" course, not, however, because laws obtain in it, but because they are absolutely lacking, and every power effects its ultimate consequences every moment. (KSA 5, p. 37)

The argument is complicated, there are two senses of "law" involved. Most readings ignore the equivocation and argue that Nietzsche undoes his own argument and some claim that he agrees with being so undone, pointing to the paradox, *Um so besser*,' so much the better.

Thus Wigner replies "It has to be admitted that we have not definite evidence that there is no such theory" (1960, p. 1). Wigner's program explains the necessary incompleteness (and thereby the advantage) of an axiomatic system, answering the question, what is mathematics and highlighting that

The principal point which will have to be recalled later is that the mathematician could formulate only a handful of interesting theorems without defining concepts beyond those contained in the axioms and that the concepts outside those contained in the axioms are defined with a view of permitting ingenious logical operations which appeal to our aesthetic sense both as operations and also in their results of great generality and simplicity. (1960, p. 3)

What is key, Wigner observes, is that what we call the laws of nature are limited:

all these laws of nature contain, in even their remotest consequences, only a small part of our knowledge of the inanimate world. All the laws of nature are conditional statements which permit a prediction of some future events on the basis of the knowledge of the present, except that some aspects of the present state of the world, in practice the overwhelming majority of the determinants of the present state of the world, are irrelevant from the point of view of the prediction. (1960, p. 5)

In other words, science just to be science excludes and necessarily excludes a good deal ("the overwhelming majority of the determinants" that might count in being able to speak of) "the present state of the world." I.e., "laws of nature are all conditional statements and they relate only to a very small part of our knowledge of the world" (1960, p. 6).

Wigner cites Galileo to make the case Gadamer cites as decisive for the new science, using Galileo's text metaphor. As a result, hermeneutics is, as Patrick Heelan observes (and as Oskar Becker had observed), crucial for philosophy of science: "the laws of nature are written in the language of mathematics" (Wigner, 1960, p. 6)<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, Gadamer qualifies the notion of a new science by contrast with the old:

Mathematics was the uncontested science of antiquity. In mathematics, truth is established from concepts through thought's own self-development. As soon as experience comes into it, science can be effective only in a supporting role. And now modernity turns everything upside down. To this day, mathematics does not know where it fits in. It has no place whatever among the natural sciences and the human sciences. Nor does it claim to have one, though it knows it is the only uncontested science of reason. (1998, p. 126)

<sup>6</sup> See further, Weyl 1940 and 1985. See for overview and discussion, Mancosu 2010 as well as Palmieri 2020, and in the same collection, Islami & Wiltsche 2020. In addition to Hilbert 1918, I refer the reader to Heelan 1987.

Thus Gadamer reminds Helmholtz could argue in the middle of the last century that the new science be based on induction, probability, projection. Mathematics is a tool—an 'instrument' to use the title of Gadamer's lecture— but is not meant to give an account of everything.

A result of (a precondition for) the new mathematical modelling of nature is that one exclude anything that does not conform to the model. In other words, to go back to the example of Galileo:

The mathematical model of nature implied that the laws of free-fall or an inclined plane must be mathematically formulable regardless of the nature of the falling bodies and the postulate of concrete observability. (Gadamer, 1998, p. 126)

But Gadamer as already noted emphasizes what throughout antiquity (and the medieval, or scholastic period) it had meant to 'know' anything. Thus Gadamer explains that

Galileo, the creator of classical mechanics, had the clearest awareness of this, and it was actually not a sharpening of his observations but an imaginative wager that led him to discover the mathematically formulable axioms of mechanics. He was aware of this himself, and clothed it in the formula "mente concipio," not allowing himself to be discouraged by the fact that the law of falling he discovered did not correspond to any observable instances of falling, because emptiness, a vacuum, had not yet been produced anywhere. Galileo's founding of mechanics altogether excluded final causes from research into nature. He explained the processes of nature in terms of causal factors and their interplay, and this step enabled a new domination of natural processes. (1998, p. 76)

## More pointedly:

Precisely by means of this mathematicizing model, [Galileo] defined a new concept—the "object" (des Objektes, des Gegenständes)—whereas before there was no such word or thing. "Object" or "Gegenstand" is

defined through a "method" that prescribes how reality gets made into an object. (1998, p. 127)

This was Heidegger's concern when he began by recalling the ancient Greek "Τὰ μαθήματα means for the Greeks that which man knows in advance in his observation of whatever is and in his intercourse with things" (1977, p. 118). This observation of prerequisite or advance presupposition, what Heidegger characterizes as the forestructure of questioning, is key to scientific objectivity as Heelan argues in his study of Heisenberg: Quantum Mechanics and Objectivity (1965) and his later, The Observable (2016). As Gadamer explains for his own part, via method (that is by way of the mathematizing model as he explicates), "reality gets made into an object" (1998, p. 127). The making is critical as Heidegger explains beginning by contrast with, 'Τὰ φυσικά,' that is to say with "things as they originate and come forth of themselves," Heidegger goes on to list the spectrum of 'things' for and of human concern: "Τὰ ποιούμενα, Τὰ χρήματα, Τὰ πράγματα, and finally Τὰ μαθήματα" (1967, p. 70). The ordering is capital and the definition recurs in axiomatic terms: "The μαθήματα are the things insofar as we take cognizance of them as what we already know them to be in advance" (1967, p. 73). Otherwise articulated: "the mathematical, is that 'about' things which we really already know. Therefore we do not first get it out of things, but in a certain way, we bring it already with us". Thereby, so Heidegger argues

the more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at the human being's disposal as conquered, and the more effectually the world stands at humanity's disposal as conquered, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively, i.e., all the more importunately, does the *subjectum* rise up, and all the more impetuously, too, do observation of and teaching about the world change into a doctrine of the human. (1977, p. 133)

I cite this to explain Gadamer's reference to Galileo's effective invention of the object, key to method in terms of the new scientific orientation to the world as object:

The aim of methodically researching the object in this way is then essentially to break down the resistance of "objects" and to dominate the processes of nature; the basic intentions of technology are certainly not conscious, but they are an immanent consequence of it, and their reality surrounds us on all sides in the shape of our technological civilization. (1998, p. 127)

At issue is the clarification of method, decisive in all sciences to this day:

Galileo's founding of mechanics altogether excluded final causes from research into nature. He explained the processes of nature in terms of causal factors and their interplay, and this step enabled a new domination of natural processes. We call this domination "technology." But this technology is not a mere secondary consequence of the new knowledge of nature, or only of its technical presuppositions—it just transfers this knowledge into the practical realm, allowing us to calculate how we should intervene into initial conditions by making their effects calculable<sup>7</sup>. (1998, p. 77)

The 'new science' is this Galilean 'science' understood on 'instrumental' terms (thus the reference to Bacon). And, invoking Günther Anders' modal terminology from his 1956 study of technology, Gadamer continues: "The technological dream bedazzles us when 'can do' becomes 'must do'" (1998, p. 80).

Gadamer highlights the way Kant changes our understanding of knowledge and thereby science and philosophy, to argue for the sake of a foundation for metaphysics able to come forth as a science as this delimits what counts and can count as a science.

<sup>7</sup> See too not only Heidegger but his student, the historian of philosophy, Wilhelm Kamlah's Von der Sprache zur Vernunft (1975) and Wissenschaft, Wahrheit, Existenz (1960).

<sup>8</sup> See for discussion of this distinction, Babich 2013 and 2022a.

Thereby "Kant provided the mathematico-scientific mode of construction, used by the new science, with the epistemological justification it needed because its ideas had no claim to existence other than as *entia rationis*" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 215).

At issue is method as Gadamer quotes Helmholtz's dedication to an invariant ideal of method, as he argued that "what is called 'method' in modern science remains the same everywhere and is only displayed in an especially exemplary form in the natural sciences" (1989, p. 7)<sup>9</sup>.

Kant's question, rigorously regarded, must be raised with respect to the human sciences as well and here Gadamer draws on Hegel, reminding us that on Kantian terms one comes to the same epistemological quandaries with respect to history as to nature assuming that both are to 'become' or to be considered sciences<sup>10</sup>.

Yet there is here a terminological challenge, especially in an Anglophone context: What is science? Wissenschaft, be it in 1862 for Helmholtz, or 1960 for Gadamer, is not limited to natural science or mathematics and for this reason Helmholtz could emphasize the 'Gesamtheit der Wissenschaften,' the unified collectivity of science in general to speak of both the natural and the human sciences as Gadamer distinguishes these in terms of inductive kinds of knowing. By adding questions of judgment, this is a 'something more,' as Howard Caygill has illuminated this in his reading of jurisprudence as 'je ne sais quoi' (Caygill, 2019), and for his part Gadamer points out that is an education or formation in the human rather than the natural sciences that constitutes culture or Bildung to this day.

Focusing on judgment and education, Gadamer begins his "On the Philosophic Elements in the Sciences and the Scientific Charac-

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer here refers to Hermann Helmholtz, "Über das Verhältnis der Naturwissenschaften zur Gesamtheit der Wissenschaften" [1862] (1896, p. 167ff; 1972, p. 122).

<sup>&</sup>quot;If history is considered to be no more a manifestation of mind than is nature, then how the human mind can know history becomes just as problematic as how nature can be known through mathematical constructs had been for Kant. Thus, just as Kant had answered the question of how pure science was possible, Dilthey had to answer the question of how historical experience can become a science" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 216).

ter of Philosophy" by differentiating the ways in which we speak of anything as a science, parsing parts and wholes in the process:

It is evident that what we call philosophy is not science in the same way as the so-called positive sciences are. It is not the case that philosophy has a positive datum alongside the standard research areas of the other sciences to be investigated but it alone, for philosophy has to do with the whole. [...] As the whole, it is an idea that transcends every finite possibility of knowledge, and so it is nothing we could know in a scientific way. And yet it still makes good sense to speak about the scientific character of philosophy. [...] philosophy can be justly called scientific because in spite of every difference from the positive sciences, it still possesses a binding proximity to them that separates it from the realm of world view based upon strictly subjective experience. (1981, p. 1)

The concern is "hermeneutic consciousness" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 127). Although distinguishing philosophical styles of rhetoric and semantics, Gadamer's point recalls Nietzsche's reference to the risks of (classical philological) hermeneutics where Nietzsche points out that the text can be in danger of vanishing "beneath the interpretation" (KSA V, §38, p. 56, my trans.). Philologists, Nietzsche had argued, turn out to represent the greatest danger to philology both by means of their interpretive turns as as well as their physical destruction of the the remnants of antiquity. In a different voice, Gadamer expands the risk into a *negative* advantage, perhaps via Eugen Fink, perhaps via Rilke: "Interpretation must play, that is it must come into play, in order to negate itself in its own achievement" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 127).

## 3. On British vs. German Philology

Several comparative readings address the initial titular terms of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* but such engagements typically reflect the terminology of analytic as opposed to hermeneutic philosophy<sup>11</sup>.

But where the 'scientific method' can seem unproblematic (of course, as Paul Feyerabend points out that it is not) what is the

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Taylor 2002 and Fultner 2011.

philological method? In an online report titled "M.L. West and the British Philological Method," Alexander Nikolaev describes finding himself seated next to Martin West at high-table—the personal anecdote being the point of high table conversation—confiding, there is a parallel with Wigner's report of his student's question, his question to the thus captive West: What is 'the' British philological method? (n.d., para. 3) In good form, West replies—philologists are metonymic beasts (Gadamer cites Helmholtz on the "readines with which the most varied experiences must flow into the memory of the historian or philologist" (Helmholtz, 1896, p. 178; Gadamer, 1989, p. 14)—with the deflationary precision: "there isn't one: you just use whatever works best to solve the problem at hand" (Nikolaev, n.d., para. 4). The exchange is transmitted via memory, as crucial as it is for Feyerabend (Feyerabend, 1975) and Nikolaev, who invokes neither Feyerabend nor Nietzsche nor Gadamer, proceeds to list select names in philology, i.e., W. M. Calder III, who is himself (silently) drawing on Basil Gildersleeve and taking a step back to Wilamowitz. Overall Nikolaev's account is informed by the Gildersleeve (1884) who fits the tradition of British philology whilst articulating a discussion of Friedrich Ritschl which seems to be German philology at high table 12, i.e., in a British context.

Reminiscences, like necrologue reports, are 'honorific.' The parallel would be, and more is needed here, Nietzsche's Diogenes Laërtius and his arguments on behalf of the 'person.' <sup>13</sup> The value of such personal accounts is what they tell us that is ancillary, in this case the silent Gildersleeve (1884, p. 340) who himself reports his personal acquaintance with luminaries of the German tradition of classical philology, to reflect that "in actual presence, Ritschl was to me something apart." In addition to reading articles that are

<sup>12</sup> See also Calder III 1975 (p. 452); Wilamowitz 1983 (pp. 257–263) (as cited by Nikolaev, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> See here Benne 2005, for discussion and antecedents along with, more recently, the concluding chapter of Constanze Güthenke's Feeling and Classical Philology (2020) as well as the first chapter of Babich, Nietzsches Antike (2020).

not always received as standard accounts of philology specific to certain cultures, note the co-relevance of Anglophone and German philology, especially as Gadamer would emphasize, the Graecists. Thus I refer to Constanz Güthenke's discussion "Enthusiasm Dwells Only in Specialization" (2015, pp. 264–284, 374–379)<sup>14</sup> in addition to her monograph on "feeling." <sup>15</sup>

With respect to Gildersleeve (and his report of Ritschl and Otto Jahn via Wilhelm Brambach, to mention another usually silenced name), <sup>16</sup> a tactic I recommend in reading Nietzsche's aphorisms forwards and backwards to the contextual array of surrounding aphorisms, applies to reading as generic genealogy, asking of scholars, who were their teachers? Gadamer tells us his own story but in Nietzsche's case we lack an autobiography (Ecce homo does not count as such and most scholars discount, with rather abundant reason, there is no original text in Nietzsche's or an amanuensis's hand, more sensationalistic attributions such as My Sister and I and others may also wish to discount reports by his contemporaries from Lou Salomé and the classicist, Karl Reinhardt, to others writing after his collapse and, in the case of his school friend, Paul Deussen, or even Franz Overbeck after Nietzsche's death)<sup>17</sup>. In the case of Nietzsche, we know he was taught by the same Ritschl mentioned above and had a specific double formation via Jahn (arguably of particular significance in Bonn not least because it led to conflict—there is nothing so influential for students as conflict between teachers, in this case Ritschl and Jahn, where what is key after more than a century is less Ritschl's work on Plautus than

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Prof. Güthenke for recommending her aptly titled monograph, Feeling and Classical Philology (cited above).

<sup>15</sup> By contrast, I note a tendency for some time dominating certain approaches to classical philology integrating AI or machine reading methods. Thus Ian Sample's "Researchers use AI to Read Word on Ancient Scroll Burned by Vesuvius," (2023) can give the impression that two student researchers—not in Latin but computer science—had used AI to crack formerly impenetrable sources but in fact and to be sure, the work of translation (thus a treasure trove for the purpose of that work) and interpretation still remain.

<sup>16</sup> See, as useful antecedent to Gildersleeve, Brambach 1865.

<sup>17</sup> See for an oblique addition to this discussion the closing section 'On Madness, Debt—and Ending at the Right Time" in Babich 2021/2022 (pp. 121–124).

that he successfully placed his students: this is how a school or a legacy is built). If one needs to focus on method and, if 'principally' there were pedagogic convergences (methodologically speaking), the differences between Ritschl and Jahn concerned what Nietzsche would call "personality" or style, the affective allure of energy or enthusiasm and a lesser (student-focussed) engagement<sup>18</sup>. Yet even a bad teacher, as Wigner emphasizes that he was in his own case and as Jaspers takes up a related point in his own lecture on the university, may, despite bad press from students, not only be substantively influential via his contributions but as a teacher for those who came into contact with him and thus Jahn, especially with respect to archaeology or material philology, is singled out as exemplifying a patent "greatness." One further needs to know when it comes to Nietzsche that in Bonn the pedagogic division also stressed meter between Ritschl and Jahn, differently articulated, foregrounding ancient Greek music in Jahn's case<sup>20</sup>.

#### 4. Nietzsche and Hermeneutics

It is owing to Heidegger that Nietzsche is both important and problematic for philosophy as Gadamer also puts the point, expressing the change in philosophy inaugurated by Heidegger (and Nietzsche was not only influential as Gadamer consistently underlines this for Heidegger but also, and this is both more radical and more subtle, for classical philology as such), as Heidegger altered the 'philosoph-

<sup>18 &</sup>quot;Die Methode ist natürlich bei Jahn und Ritschl nicht principiell verschieden. Ritschl geht mit Genialität auf die Gedanken seiner Schüler ein, lenkt sie mit seltener. Energie zur Erforschung der Währheit und fördert so neben dem rein wissenschaftlichen Ziel auch wesentlich die sittliche Durchbildung. Daneben sind die von ihm ertheilten stilistischen Unterweisungen nicht hoch genug anzuschlagen. Jahn zeigt dagegen einen sehr fühlbaren Mangel an Energie und eine zu grosse Vernachlässigung des Stils" (Brambach, 1865, p. 23).

<sup>19</sup> Again I quote Brambach, "Wer den archäologischen Uebungen Jahns einige Zeit beigewohnt hat, wird zugeben , dass Jahn hier eine Grösse ist" (1865, p. 23).

<sup>20</sup> Brambach (1865, p. 24f.) helpfully lists, comparatively, the Lehrplan in Bonn, divided between Ritschl and Jahn, noting under 'Metrik,' "Griechische Musik [Litt.]," for Jahn, as opposed to Plautus in the case of Ritschl.

ical consciousness' of his day in a "single stroke" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 138). To this extent, Gadamer emphasizes Nietzsche's influence on Heidegger (and Reiner Schürmann makes the same point, without reference, heavens above, to Gadamer, in his own seminars on Heidegger):

In raising the question of being and thus reversing the whole direction of Western metaphysics, the true predecessor of Heidegger was neither Dilthey nor Husserl, then, but rather Nietzsche. Heidegger may have realized this only later; but in retrospect we can see that the aims already implicit in *Being and Time* were to raise Nietzsche's radical critique of "Platonism" to the level of the tradition he criticizes, to confront Western metaphysics on its own level, and to recognize that transcendental inquiry is a consequence of modern subjectivism, and so overcome it. (1989, p. 248)<sup>21</sup>

At issue is the question and the ability to raise the appropriate question, as Facundo Bey (2024, p. 84) points out:

To know what is worth questioning, Gadamer will say several years later, it is not enough to master the methods, the means of science, ... but it also demands 'hermeneutical imagination' (hermeneutische Phantasie), 'the creative imagination of the scientist' or the capacity to sense the 'questionableness [Fragwürdige] of something and what this requires of us.' <sup>22</sup>

Crucially, Gadamer foregrounds the relevance (and conceptual transformation) of the term 'horizon' for Nietzsche and Husserl, clarified in terms of the 'situation' as this appears in Jaspers as well as Heidegger and subsequently in Adorno as well as Anders:

We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the

<sup>21</sup> The point, as I emphasize elsewhere cannot but be compounded with an emphasis on Heidegger's confrontation with the limits of that same encounter.

<sup>22</sup> Bey quotes here Gadamer 2013 (p. 576) and 2001 (p. 42).

concept of situation is the concept of "horizon." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth. (1989, p. 301)<sup>23</sup>

Gadamer draws on Jaspers' conception of 'situation' as explicated beginning with the title of his 1930, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (translated for whatever curious reason into English as *Man in the Modern Age*, a rendering sacrificing both spirit and 'situation')<sup>24</sup> which Gadamer expands via a Heideggerian 'horizon' to argue that "working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition" (1989, p. 301).

The concept of science stands today, as already emphasized above, specifically the natural sciences, "under definite conditions of methodological abstraction." Thus the calculated exclusion of situation that effectively enables "the success of modern sciences," thereby obscuring 'other possibilities for questioning [andere Fragemöglichkeiten durch Abstraktion abgedeckt warden]." (Gadamer, 1976, p. 11; GW 2, p. 226).

Key to *Truth and Method*, Gadamer follows Heidegger's insight into the specific conditions for truth as explored in *Being and Time* along with Heidegger's focus on truth in his several lectures on "The Origin of the Work of Art" to the Reclam edition of which Gadamer also contributes an afterword/introduction. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had argued that with regard to truth and science: "Before Newton's laws were discovered, they were not 'true'" (1986, p. 226). Heidegger expands his point as hermeneutic and as concerned with law, the same concern with law that intrigues both Kant and Nietzsche, with respect to physics: "Through Newton the laws became true; and with them, entities became accessible

<sup>23</sup> Misleading by contrast can be the emphasis on the supposed parallel between Gadamer and analytic philosophy in Nuyen 1990.

<sup>24</sup> See Jaspers 1931, 1957, and Harth 1986 (pp. 137-138).

in themselves to *Dasein*" (1986, p. 227). As a consequence, "Before there was any Dasein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Dasein is no more" (1986, p. 226). No correspondence theory of truth, this presupposes "objective coherence," methodologically defined as an "objective coherence that has a statistical character in atomic physics" (1977, p. 172).

As the physicist and philosopher of quantum mechanics, already noted above in connection with Wigner, his associate during his own time at Princeton, Heelan uses the Husserlian language of 'profile,' he also develops his own logic of framework transpositions, to emphasize in a Heideggerian, hermeneutic context:

The event that is observed is always already interpreted as an actual—or possible—manifestation of a scientific object of which the measurement is a profile<sup>26</sup> (1995, p. 584).

Heelan's language follows both Heidegger and Gadamer. Thus Heelan reminds us that

Tarski, for instance, proposed to define truth as a property of statements. Thus, let 'p' ('Snow is white') be a statement, then: 'p' ('Snow is white') is true if and only if p (snow is white). From the hermeneutic perspective such an account turns out either to beg the question or to be vacuous. For consider: how is the meaning of the sentence 'p' ('Snow is white') arrived at? Words to be meaningful need a context of use and a users' community, but there are an infinite variety of contexts of use and of users' communities for the sentence 'p' ('Snow is white') giving different meanings, yet none is specified in Tarski's definition. Turning to the other half of the definition, how is it determined that p (snow is white)? By experience, of course! But either experience presupposes an ability to use language correctly which begs

<sup>25</sup> See Heelan 1965 and 2015. Helpful here is a phenomenologically minded review by Downes (2023).

<sup>26</sup> Heelan's title, "Heidegger's Longest Day: Twenty-Five Years Later," alludes to Bill Richardson's earlier essay on Heidegger and Roger Bacon. Cf. here: Heelan 1998.

the question or is indeterminate and so cannot function as a criterion.  $(1998, p. 289)^{27}$ 

This can help us to understand why Gadamer assesses Husserl's *Crisis* as a response to Heidegger's *Being and Time*: "The *Crisis* attempts to give an implicit answer to *Being and Time*" (1976, p. 161). Elsewhere I read the *Crisis* together with Heidegger's "Nietzsche's Word God is Dead," (Babich, 2024) arguing, as Robert Sokolowski also argues that this entails that Husserl concedes at least some of the limits of his own project (in addition to, and this would be crucial for Husserl, the recognition that Heidegger was not continuing that project). To articulate, Gadamer cites Husserl's 1935 appendix to the *Crisis* successively,

"Philosophy as science, as serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous, science—the dream is over." And further, "Philosophy once thought of itself as the science of the totality of what is." "But these times are over—such is the generally reigning opinion of such people. A powerful and constantly growing current of philosophy that renounces scientific discipline, like the current religious disbelief, is inundating European humanity." (1976, p. 158)

Heidegger's dependence on Husserl (Gadamer repeats Becker's judgment; 1976, p. 157) and thereby Husserl's epistemological acuity is scarcely to be overstated. Thus Gadamer reflects on Husserl and arithmetic in a spirit that echoes Heelan's observations on Tarski

One of Husserl's first important insights, present in his *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, was to recognize in the example of the symbolic number that there exist no monolithic and dogmatic concepts of givenness at all. What could the concept of givenness mean, for example, in the

<sup>27</sup> Heelan who developed his own quantum logic adds the qualification: "Tarski's logical definition, however, was proposed within a philosophical framework different from the one used in this paper and within that framework was unquestioned until recently" (1998, p. 289). See for a different discussion of Gadamer and Tarski, via Davidson, Malpas 2002.

case of infinite numbers, which by definition can never actually be produced but nevertheless have a well-defined mathematical meaning? (1976, p. 184)

One can explicate Heidegger's theory of truth, if typically without the terminology of hermeneutics, to argue that it is indispensable for "qualitative" research as such (Huttunen and Kakkori, 2020)<sup>28</sup>. As one critical reader of Gadamer's goals in *Truth and Method* explains, Gadamer seeks to avoid relativism while simultaneously distancing

hermeneutics from the objectivist idea that there is a scientific method (*Methode*) that gives insight to an interpreter independent of any reciprocal relation with what is being interpreted. (Ramsbotham, 2019, p. 75)<sup>29</sup>

Later Gadamer unpacks what is meant by prejudice as constitutive of our orientation to the world and thus the multifarious tasks of hermeneutics, reflecting on what he calls "an unstated reliance upon prejudices" with specific respect to a *habitus* characteristic of the natural sciences, where:

for instance, for the sake of presuppositionless knowledge and scientific objectivity the method of a proven science like that of physics is carried over into such other areas as that of social theory without methodological modification. An even more salient case that occurs more and more in our times is the invocation of science as the highest authority in the decision making processes of society. Here, as only hermeneutical reflection is capable of demonstrating, the interest that is bound together with knowledge is overlooked. (1976, p. 92)<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Thus see for another reading between Tarski and Heidegger, similarly eschewing the language of hermeneutics, Allen 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Ramsbotham largely follows Hans Kogler's earlier "A Critique of Dialogue in Philosophical Hermeneutics," (2014). Cf. here Keane 2021, as the effort of broadening reception always seems to turn on finding that analytic philosophy is already there, or already has the necessary conceptual frame. On hermeneutics in scientific inquiry see Ginev 2016.

<sup>30</sup> See also Gadamer 1976 (p. 82).

# 5. Gadamer and Nietzsche on Philology/Philosophy

Gadamer stressed the proximity of philology and philosophy theoretically and personally as he himself also exemplified this conjunction.<sup>31</sup> Thus Gadamer reflects, *nota bene*, not with respect to Nietzsche but the preeminent Wilamowitz von Möllendorff, to clarify:

Anyone who knows anything of the Greek language and tradition will hear at once how close the two concepts are to one another, better still: how they flow into one another and over flow into one another on both sides (GW 6, p. 272).<sup>32</sup>

These are key complements but they run the risk—and here there is a reference to Max Weber's *Wissenschaft als Beruf*— of falling into the Scylla of scepticism or *Misologie* (the reference is to Kant) and an impatience with so-called "theory" and the Charybdis, in the case of philosophy to the mere appearance of the same (the reference is to Hegel), complete with a love for "calculable matters" [*Berechenbarkeiten*], that is today the quantitative and pragmatic or what belongs to utility and profit<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> See for a comprehensive a discussion, the Hungarian Gadamer scholar, the late István Fehér, "'Love of Words'-'Love of Wisdom,': Philology and Philosophy from a Hermeneutical Perspective" (2013) along with Babich 2022b.

<sup>32 &</sup>quot;Wer etwas von griechischer Sprache und Überlieferung weiß, hört sofort, wie nahe beide Begriffe einander sind, oder besser: wie sie ineinanderfließen und nach beiden Seiten überfließen." Fehér, who also cites "Philosophie und Philologie. Über von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff," emphasizes both Gadamer's foregrounding of Wilamowitz-Möllendorf and the Gadamer biographer, Jean Grondin's assessment of Gadamer as classical philologist, attested via no lesser name than that of Werner Jaeger, as a "solid classical philologist." Here Feher 2013, citing Grondin 1999 (p. 146).

<sup>33 &</sup>quot;Die Gefahr ist, daß bei dem Scheitern der Suche nach Wahrheit die Liebe zu den Logoi, die die Liebe zum Denken ist, in Misologie, Skepsis, Verzweiflung am Denken umschlägt. Philosophie ihrerseits meint die Liebe zum "sophon", und das hat den weitesten Sinn der Liebe zu dem, was jenseits aller Berechenbarkeiten und aller Verheißungen von Nutzen und Gewinn anziehend ist – wie alles Schöne. Der Philologe, der die Logoi liebt, und der Mann, dessen theoretische Leidenschaft über den Nutzen und Nachteil des alltäglich Pragmatischen hinausstrebt, scheinen also fust dasselbe" (GW 6, p. 272).

Love however is a challenging concept, involving 'feeling' quite in the sense of Güthenke's monograph, Feeling and Classical Philology, already noted above. How is the 'love' either of science, scholarship, study, i.e., as Gadamer says, the logoi/logos or the 'love' of wisdom or sophon, to be connected, as Gadamer says they are? In Human, All too Human, a text written while he was still teaching Classics at Basel, Nietzsche had argued the case for a certain methodological variation.

The political theorist, Tracy B. Strong invokes this testing under the calculatedly provocative rubric of 'philosophical cruising' (2000, p. xxx), to highlight, as Gadamer will also speak of this as an 'experimental' procedure to use Nietzsche's terms. The tactic was drawn from Ritschl. Thus we may read, in *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* I, Nietzsche's methodological aphorism, *Liebe als Kunstgriff/Love as Artifice*:

He who really wants to get to know something new (be it a person, an event, or a book) does well to entertain it with all possible love and to avert his eyes quickly from everything in it he finds inimical, repellent, false, indeed to banish it from mind: so that, for example, he allows the author of the book the longest start and then, like one watching a race, desires with beating heart that he may reach his goal. (KSA 2, §621, p. 350)

The tactic also makes an appearance in Nietzsche's programmatic description of "the ascetic ideal," as "a device [Kunstgriff] for the preservation of life" (KSA 5, §13, p. 366), in the third treatise of On the Genealogy of Morality. Thus Nietzsche reflects on love as invocation, as idea, as ideal, as the very 'refined' technique that elevated Christianity above other religions <sup>34</sup>. The term, Kunstgriff, advances Schopenhauer's eristic dialectical art of 'spiritual fencing,' techniques (Schopenhauer counts 38 of these deceptives feints), tricks for being right—Die Kunst, recht zu behalten (2014) <sup>35</sup>—advanced in

<sup>34</sup> Love is the "feinste Kunstgriff, welchen das Christenthum vor den übrigen Religionen voraus hat" (KSA 2, §95, p. 414).

<sup>35</sup> I note that *Kunstgriff*, abbreviated as *Kunst* can also be translated as 'trick' in the fashion of the internet's 'this weird trick' (helps you to earn a fortune, lose weight, etc.).

the service of investigation, thus *stratagemata* (2014, p. 20), <sup>36</sup> or the ruses of the 'art of war,' and all of this is method. This is not unlike Feyerabend's favorite television detective, the fictional Lt. Columbo's practiced informality in engaging with his suspects.

Love as methodological trick is also conventionally named 'hermeneutic generosity,' if this description undoes the generosity that is key to the tactic. One thereby gives the object the benefit of the doubt, fully, even if only provisionally, even to the extent, as Nietzsche says, giving them an assist of a kind. The same generosity inspires Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon* and animates Thomas Aquinas' method of questioning contra his opponents<sup>37</sup>.

Qua scholarly stratagem, hermeneutic empathy can be the key to a successful case in law. Note that just as it is a 'trick,' it is a 'feeling' one need not 'feel'. As Nietzsche says, love cannot be commanded, though it can be learned (and Strong for his part argues that love is nonetheless incumbent on all of us). Yet as ruse or device, 'love' works where antagonism does not as it alone affords where hostility blocks access to a text and can thus work even contra research prejudices. Again, and as Strong does not fail to emphasize, this coincides with the Christian conundrum where love cannot be commanded, it can be adopted, like a fencer's feint. But as Gadamer emphasizes by saying that philology/philosophy "flow into one another and overflow into one another on both sides" (GW 6, p. 272) as tactic/technique, this works both on the subject of the inquiry and the inquirer. For his part, as Gildersleeve reminds us, Nietzsche here repeats Ritschl's methodological imperatives, including the hermeneutic prohibition: "No prejudices" in addition to the commandment to "Penetrate into the heart of the matter with your interpretation," and not less, his related maxims: "Never grow weary in trying to find ways" as well as, already cited above, "'Don't go into criticism until you exhaust hermeneutics'." (Gildersleeve, 1884, pp. 349–350)

<sup>36</sup> Schopenhauer's footnote tells us that strategemata is another way to translate, along with Kriegslisten, ruses of war, Kunstgriff.

<sup>37</sup> See Johnson 1981. Beyond this point, Rogers 1996.

In this same canonically hermeneutic spirit, we recognize Gadamer's discussion of openness to the other qua other. Foregrounding this, we can bracket our prejudices, while noting, as Nietzsche emphasizes, assuming one manages to get far enough to secure access, that "reason can afterwards make its reservations" just to the extent that "over-estimation, that temporary suspension of the critical pendulum, was just an artifice for luring forth the soul of a thing" (KSA 2, §621, p. 350).

The temporary suspension of the critical attitude, as a ruse, allows the investigator to approach a thing on its terms thereby recognizing that when we seek to understand we have to bracket (if without supposing that we can ultimately dispense with) our 'prejudices,' a point Gadamer articulates by way of Heidegger's forestructures of understanding. As Gadamer explains:

All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or the text. But this openness always includes our own placing the other meaning in a relation with the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. ... [Thus] ... a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. (1989, p. 238)

# 6. Conclusion: Gadamer on Questioning 'Everything That Has Taken Us in Unquestioningly'

For Nietzsche, there is hermeneutic love or generosity [Kunstgriff]; for Gadamer, hermeneutic preparation [Kunstlehre], including limit, analogous to what Gadamer describes as the familiar "experience of being pulled up short by the text." Here reason's reservations are called for: "Either it does not yield any meaning or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 237). In the sciences this is akin to what is a 'presupposed incompleteness,' to recall Wigner as cited above on mathematics and ax-

<sup>38</sup> I discuss this and its consequences for Gadamer's thinking on the possibility of understanding otherwise, in Babich 2022b.

iomatic systems. By contrast, "the relative completeness of understanding" Gadamer identifies in Schleiermacher and von Humboldt can be bridged, as Gadamer suggests

by feeling, by an immediate, sympathetic, and congenial understanding. Hermeneutics is an art and not a mechanical process. Thus it brings its work, understanding, to completion like a work of art. (1989, p. 140)

At issue remains our lack of questioning, especially when it comes to the sciences, as Heidegger reminds us. It was this "question-worthiness," as Heidegger expands this emphasis, Nietzsche sought to highlight (Babich, 2023). In this context/tension, Gadamer reflects hermeneutics is "the theory and also the practice of understanding and bringing to language the alien, the strange, and whatever has become alien" (1981, p. 149). If one is always 'underway to understanding,' that is also to say, with Gadamer, that one always understands in a different way, "if one understands at all" (1989, p. 264, trans. modif.), <sup>39</sup> what is crucial is de-mythification of that which we do not take to be myth, in which we have faith. Unquestioned today as Nietzsche reminds us, as Heidegger, as Gadamer reminds us, is modern science. Yet questioning, Gadamer contends, especially *contra* "everything we think we control"

may help us regain our freedom in relation to everything that has taken us in unquestioningly, and so especially with respect to our own capabilities. In the end, Plato remains correct. Only by the demythologization of science (which controls what is proper to it but cannot know the one whom it serves) can the mastery of knowledge and ability become self-knowledge. (1981, p. 150)

<sup>39</sup> Cf. "es genügt zu sagen, daß man anders versteht, wenn man überhaupt versteht" (Gadamer, 1975, p. 280).

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# CAPÍTULOVI / CHAPTER VI

# REASON, HISTORY, AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM

Roger W. H. Savage

### RESUMEN

Al insistir en que la razón se manifiesta para nosotros solo en aquellas situaciones históricamente concretas en las que nos encontramos, Hans-Georg Gadamer abre la puerta a una prolongada investigación sobre la universalidad del problema hermenéutico. La comprensión gadameriana del papel que juega la metáfora respecto al trabajo del lenguaje proporciona un punto de partida fecundo para explicar cómo las obras y los actos amplían el campo de nuestras experiencias. El núcleo poético del *logos*, la operación metafórica que conduce a la creación de nuevos significados, contrarresta la fascinación por deconstruir el pensamiento metafísico. La crítica de Gadamer a la razón ilustrada se sitúa, consecuentemente, en el umbral de un renovado compromiso con la finitud

humana, la razón y la verdad. Gracias a las obras, palabras, hechos y actos que rompen el dominio de prácticas y hábitos de pensamiento cristalizados, la capacidad de superar lo real desde dentro adquiere su especificidad concreta en aquellas circunstancias en las que la pertinencia de tales obras, palabras, hechos y actos se manifiesta históricamente. Que lo pertinente sea una cuestión de deliberación y discernimiento subraya la importancia que Gadamer otorga a la *Bildung* en la promoción de la capacidad de pensar y juzgar por uno mismo *como si* fuera desde la perspectiva de todos. El énfasis que pone en la relación entre *ethos* y *logos* nos conduce, consecuentemente, a través del umbral de una consideración ulterior de la universalidad del problema hermenéutico a la luz de la multiplicidad de tradiciones que los grupos culturales y las comunidades históricas reclaman como propias.

Palabras clave: Bildung, Hermenéutica, Lenguaje, Metaforicidad, Razón, Verdad.

### **ABSTRACT**

By insisting that reason becomes manifests for us only in those historically concrete situations in which we find ourselves, Hans-Georg Gadamer opens the door to a sustained investigation into the universality of the hermeneutical problem. Gadamer's insight into the role that metaphor plays as regards the work of language provides a fecund starting point for drawing out how works and acts augment the field of our experiences. The poetic nucleus of the *logos*, the metaphorical operation leading to the creation of new meanings countermands the fascination with deconstructing metaphysical thought. Gadamer's critique of Enlightenment reason accordingly stands at the gateway to a renewed engagement with human finitude, reason, and truth. Thanks to works, words, deeds, and acts that break the hold of congealed practices and habits of thought, the capacity for surpassing the real from within acquires its concrete specificity in those circumstances in which the fitting-

ness of such works, words, deeds, and acts becomes historically manifest. That what is fitting is a matter of deliberation and discernment underscores the significance Gadamer places on *Bildung* in promoting the ability to think and to judge for oneself *as if* from the standpoint of everyone. The stress he lays on the relation between *ethos* and *logos* consequently draws us across the threshold of a further consideration of the universality of the hermeneutical problem in light of the multiplicity of traditions to which cultural groups and historical communities lay claim as their own.

**Keywords:** *Bildung*, Hermeneutics, Language, Metaphoricity, Reason, Truth.

## 1. Introduction

The idea that reason for us obtains only in those historically concrete situations in which we find ourselves places the reach of the hermeneutical problem in relief. Once regarded as the province of theories of interpretation, the challenges of understanding texts, works of art, and traces of the past have given rise to a more comprehensive account of the hermeneutical situation. The universality of our hermeneutical condition invites us to consider how reason is manifest in the claims that texts, works, and the past make on us. Every experience occasioned by a text, an art work, or an exemplary act or life is an event of truth. Claims to truth raised by our encounters with cultural phenomena that demand to be understood consequently set this event's singular character at the heart of reason's historical instantiation.

By taking the event of truth as a touchstone for my investigations into reason's concrete specificity, I want in my chapter to keep in view how the plurality of traditions, aspirations, and demands that characterize the state of multicultural societies today figures in the hermeneutical problem. Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of the ideal of reason espoused by the Enlightenment admits a place for the multiplicity of perspectives, orientations, and outlooks that give rise

to competing and conflicting systems of values and points of view. Calling this ideal of reason into question by thematizing the ineluctable role prejudice plays resonates with denouncements of the hegemony of the Enlightenment's universalizing ambition in this regard. At the same time, Gadamer's confidence in the power of the word stands in marked contrast to postmodern suspicions of meaning, reason, and truth. That our experiences of being a part of the history in which we are caught up and to which we therefore belong precedes every new encounter is indicative of our hermeneutical situation. The power of language to reveal dimensions of our experiences that otherwise remain hidden is accordingly the initial touchstone for a sustained inquiry into the way that works, words, deeds, and acts transcend the given order from within.

# 2. The Linguisticality of Experience and the Event of Truth

The power of language to surpass the perspectival limitations of our individual vantage points offers a first indication of the way that the experience occasioned by a text, work, or dialogical engagement with another constitutes an event of truth. In order to combat the modern prejudice that the subject's methodological distancing from the object of knowledge is the requisite condition of all truth, Gadamer provides a phenomenological account of the event that structures the movement of understanding. Understanding, Gadamer tells us, "is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself" (Gadamer 1989, p. 259). The concept of understanding is accordingly neither a methodological one nor does it rest on an inverse operation whereby expressions of humanity objectified in works are referred back to their authors' intentions. Rather, understanding is "Dasein's mode of being, insofar as it is potentiality-for-being and 'possibility'" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 259).

By insisting that "[l]anguage is the language of reason itself" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 401), Gadamer places the event of truth under the aegis of the matter in question. Far from reliving another's impressions, the exchanges involved in coming to an un-

derstanding of an episode recounted or an opinion or a point of view expressed constitutes the dialogical structure of the "experience (Erfahrung) of meaning" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 384; italics added). The verbal character of this dialogical process bears out the role language plays as the medium of the understanding achieved through the back-and-forth movement ordered by the play of questions and answers animating the conversation. The matter under discussion consequently reveals itself only through the back-and-forth movement of the dialogue through which it takes shape. The hermeneutical problem, Gadamer accordingly explains, "concerns not the correct mastery of language but the coming to a proper understanding about the subject matter, which takes place in the medium of language" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 385). The measure of agreement of the partners in a conversation rests on the proximate equivalence of these partners' respective understandings vis-à-vis the possible interpretations that could be given. Moreover, the verbal form in which understanding is articulated in language invariably "contains within it[self] an infinite dimension that transcends all bounds" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 401), as there is always something more to say.

The claim to truth that Gadamer maintains works and texts make in confronting us with the meaning they bear within themselves sets the temporal character of the act of understanding in relief. The paradox of a work of art's or eminent text's timelessness springs from the way that the work or text occasions an experience for a spectator, reader, or listener each time they open themselves to what the work has to say. This availability for new encounters and experiences, Gadamer often reminds us, is fundamental to the hermeneutical situation in which the claim a work or text, for example, makes on us culminates in the impact it has on our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. By the same token, the work or text presents itself to us at different times, in different places, and in changing social and political circumstances thanks to the power they have to speak anew. That a work or text holds its meaning in readiness is thus only the condition for the interpre-

tive accomplishment that renders the truth to which the work or text lays claim contemporaneous with its spectators', readers', or listeners' worlds.

Gadamer's phenomenological account of the mode of being of the work of art is instructive in this regard. Following his critique first of the subjectivization of aesthetics and then of German Idealism's appropriation of Kant's claim that "Fine art is the art of genius," (cited in Gadamer, 1989, p. 58; see Kant, 1987, p. 175), he recovers the structure of the experience through which the work expresses the meaning borne within itself. The way the work renders the experience occasioned by it communicable is decisive when it comes to combatting the alienating effects of an aesthetic attitude that places the work at a distance as an aesthetic object. That the "being of all play is always self-realization, sheer fulfillment, energeia which has its telos within itself" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 113; italics added) provides the clue that frees our understanding of a work's power to address us from the grip of the nineteenth-century cult of Bildung and its bourgeois religion of art. By emphasizing that play is nothing other than "the occurrence of the movement as such" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 103), Gadamer accordingly lays bare play's fundamental character. The play of light on the surface of water, for example, structures our experience of it by presenting itself. In a somewhat similar vein, in the sporting arena, the actions of the players shape the game. These actions make sense thanks to the initial readability conferred on them by the rules. Their intelligibility accordingly rests on the spectators' practical competence for following the game. Additionally, the spirit of each game becomes manifest in the manner and style through which it unfolds. We might wonder whether the modern ritualized spaces of contemporary sporting spectacles have vacated the agonistic spirit of the ancient Olympic games, where freeborn men participated in the theater of competition to distinguish themselves through displays of agility,

<sup>1</sup> Women were permitted to enter horses in equestrian events. There is also an account of a woman named Belistiche who won a chariot race at the Olympics.

speed, and strength<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, can we not recognize that in the theater of sporting competitions the contest still stands at the heart of the sporting event? This event in essence consists in nothing other than the playing of the game. Hence, like the play of light on the water, the game at root fulfills its purpose in presenting itself.

The hermeneutical autonomy of a work owing to the fact that it bears its meaning within itself gives the fundamental character of the phenomenon of play its proper anthropological dimension. Play's transformation as regards the unity of a work's unfolding course detaches play from the activity of the players so that it "consists [only] in the pure appearance [Erscheinung] of what they are playing" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 10; italics added). That play here "has the character of a work, of an ergon and not only of energia" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 110; italics added) controverts the bourgeoise cult of art religion's conception of the aesthetic as a realm of freedom where the human spirit was believed to be truly at home (cf. Bourdieu, 1984, p. 19; see Arendt, 1968, p. 202). The artist's consecration as a "'secular savior' (Immerman)" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 88; italics added) ratified the disintegration of the processes of formation and cultivation that Reinhardt Koselleck reminds us vests the concept of *Bildung* with its moral and political force under the guise of a "universal form of aesthetic culture" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 88; see Koselleck, 2002, pp. 184–94). Contrariwise, in the case of poetry, for instance, play's transformation into the structure (Gebilde) presented through the recitation of the work brings the meaning of the fleeting articulations of sounds, rhythms, rhymes, assonances, alliterations, and the like to a stand. We therefore should not mistake this structure's temporally dynamic character for an atemporal or detemporalizing abstraction. Rather, the transformation into a closed world in which "play expresses itself in the unity of its course" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 113) constitutes the mode of being through which the work of art renders itself communicable.

By maintaining that the language of art is the medium in which the work speaks, I want to draw out how a hermeneutical consideration of the work's communicability bears on a broader consideration of the relation between the logos and truth. Gadamer's assertion that the "imminent logic of the subject matter" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 368) unfolds through the play of question and answer in a dialogue has an analogical counterpart in the way that the worlding of the work is the spring of the claim it makes on us. A work, he reminds us, is "the expression of a truth" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 95) that is irreducible to its creator's thoughts, feelings, and intentions. In light of his phenomenological account of the work of art's mode of being, its style and quality of formation is the vis-à-vis of the manner in which it addresses us. By neutralizing the question of the impact a work has, aesthetic consciousness takes possession of the work as an object of aesthetic culture. Conversely, the work's constitutive make-up, which as the object of aesthetic consciousness allegedly authorizes the alienating attitude that Gadamer's account of the mode of being of the work of art combats, is the conditio per quam of the work's worlding power. The truth to which the work singularly attests shines forth in accordance with the way that the work presents itself. Art, Martin Heidegger here tells us, "lets truth originate" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 77<sup>2</sup>). This appearing of truth, which the work brings into being through the manner in which it unfolds, constitutes the event at the heart of the reality of the work. The language the work speaks is therefore the medium through which the sense contained by the work unfolds the plenitude of meaning that is the mark of its poetic character<sup>3</sup>.

That so-called absolute music represents the "great achievement of musical abstraction in western culture" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 38) puts to the test Gadamer's thesis that a work speaks to us as a work rather than "as the bearer of a message" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 33). Drawing on art's anthropological foundations in the phenomenon of

<sup>2</sup> For Heidegger, the reality of the work is accordingly "defined by that which is at work in the work" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 57).

<sup>3</sup> Art, Gadamer accordingly tells us, "is the containment of sense" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 34). Secured and sheltered by the work's ordered configuration, this sense is the wellspring of the work's ontological vehemence. The "ontological plenitude of the truth that addresses us in art" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 34) is accordingly the vis-à-vis of the excess that I previously indicated has its anthropological foundation in play.

play, the language of art is for him manifest in the way in which this work speaks to us as only it can. Listening to this work and hearing the affective tonalities reverberating in the moods and feelings to which we become attuned fulfills the intention of this mode of poetic expression in which all ostensive references are suspended. Heidegger remarks that in "poetical discourse, the communication of the existential possibilities of one's state-of-mind can become an aim in itself, . . [which] amounts to a disclosing of existence" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 205)<sup>4</sup>. The medium in which the work raises its claim to truth is the one through which it addresses us. The language of the work of art, Gadamer therefore stresses, is the language the work itself speaks, "whether it is linguistic in nature or not" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 100). By giving voice to feelings and moods that the work possesses, music refashions our manner of inhering in the world in accordance with its worlding power (see Savage, 2010; Savage, 2018). The truth to which the work lays claim is consequently at the same time an event occasioned by the work in rendering the experience it affords communicable.

By putting to the test his thesis that the language of art is the one the work speaks, Gadamer's remarks on absolute music highlight the place that hearing has for a hermeneutical consideration of history, reason, and truth. The "idea of belonging (*Zugehörig-keit*)" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 462) that figures in Gadamer's account of the lingual character of tradition foregrounds the acts of listening to . . . and hearing as . . . , the first of which for Heidegger "is Dasein's existential way of Being-open" (Heidegger 1962, p. 206), and the second of which is the condition for understanding. The "primacy of hearing over seeing . . . [owing] to the universality of the *logos*" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 462n103) is apparent in the art of the Socratic method, which for Gadamer owes its maieutic productivity to the use of words as the midwife of the immanent logic of the play of question and answer. Similar to the way that a

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger reminds us that the world is "never an object that stands before us" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 44).

literary work, a dramatic presentation, or a piece of music expresses its world through unfolding it, the back-and-forth movement of dialogical exchanges reveals the subject matter as it takes shape. This movement transcends the interlocutors' individual perspectives and opinions in bringing the matter in question to light. The logos thus emerges in its truth thanks to its structured articulation. Language, Gadamer therefore tells us, is "not just one of ... [our] possessions" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 443; see Gadamer, 1976<sup>5</sup>). Rather, we owe the fact that we have a world at all to the power of language to bring it to expression. Language, Gadamer accordingly maintains, "has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 443). For Greek thought, this "coming into language is . . . nothing other than the presencing of the being itself, its aletheia" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 457; italics added). As an "expressible matter of fact" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 446), the logos for Greek thought stands out against the whole through disclosing the truth of that which is evident in human thought. Gadamer remarks that the Greek sense of the "factualness of language" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 446) forestalled the development of a hermeneutical understanding of language as the linguistic ground of the world's disclosure and hence of our being in it. Our ability to see and to understand the world from the vantage points we gain through listening and speaking attests to the freedom inhering in the capacity to surpass or transcend our given orientations in acquiring another. Language, Gadamer consequently insists, "has its true being only in dialogue, [that is,] in coming to an understanding" (Gadamer 1989, p. 446; original emphasis). The movement that in a dialogue reveals the subject matter in accordance with the manner in which it unfolds is thus at the same time the vis-à-vis of the truth that comes to language as disclosed by it.

That this coming to language of what for us constitutes the world that we inhabit rests on language's "fundamental metaphoricity" (Ga-

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer accordingly maintains that "[l]anguage is the fundamental mode of our beingin-the world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 3).

damer, 1989, p. 431) sets the truth manifest by it under the aegis of the schematizing operation from which the concepts we employ spring. The capacity for discovering similarities through transferring attributes of a combative sport, for example, to diplomatic negotiations as in the statement, "The peace process is on the ropes," not only enlarges the semantic fields of each; by picturing the peace process as if it were being pummeled by an opponent and on the verge of collapse, this metaphorical expression of the impending failure of a strategic engagement with the warring factions in order to bring an armed conflict to an end augments iconically the field of thought. The metaphorical transference of literal attributes to non-literal ones, Gadamer points out, has not only a logical function but it also constitutes the "advance work of language itself" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 431) in conceptualizing the real. By leaving open the question as to how universal concepts are formed, Aristotle for him reserved a place for the logical productivity of language and its "perfectly undogmatic freedom" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 4326). Privileging the allegedly "proper" meaning of a word obviates how the linguistic constitution of resemblances in which the apperception or sudden insight into a likeness despite the semantic distance between remotely related ideas, entities, or things brings this likeness to expression. Thanks to the power of novel metaphors to set new meanings "before our eyes," the ability to uncover or propose aspects of the real that otherwise would remain hidden by figuring them in speech is the hallmark of our capacity for surpassing or transcending the established order from within.

That we live in metaphoricity brings to the fore the metaphorical structure of claims to truth. Jacques Derrida reminds us that the play of difference that, citing Ferdinand de Saussure, he stresses "is the condition for the possibility and functioning of every sign" (Derrida, 1982, p. 5; see de Saussure, 1983) calls into question

<sup>6</sup> Gadamer at the same time remarks that Aristotle's critiques of Speuisippus' doctrine and Plato's diairetical dialectic "robbed the logical achievement of language of its scientific legitimacy[, which can only be]...recognized from the point of view of rhetoric and is understood there as the artistic device of metaphor" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 432).

the truth of every representation as the reduplication and representation of some existent thing. The accomplice of the representative illusion, the concept of language espoused by representative thought when it treats language as the exteriorization of some mental image founds the metaphysics of presence on the alleged adequation of the sensible and the intelligible (see Ricoeur, 1977, p. 284). Heidegger's claim that the "metaphorical exists only within the bounds of the metaphysical" (Heidegger, cited in Ricoeur, 1977, p. 282) places the complicity between the wearing-away of metaphor, such that the primary philosophemes such as eidos, logos, and theoria defining the field of metaphysical thought assume their "proper" meaning, and the raising up of metaphysical thought in relief. Paul Ricoeur comments that Derrida's stroke of genius in exposing the drift toward thought's idealization was to enter the "domain of metaphor not by way of its birth but . . . by way of its death" (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 285<sup>7</sup>) in order to deconstruct the play of oppositions between nature and freedom, history and spirit, the sensible and the spiritual, the intelligible, and sense or meaning. By erasing the traces of their production, "proper" meanings assigned to concepts occlude what remains unsaid, thereby obfuscating the creation in language of new ways of inhering in the world thanks to the impact that the work of metaphor has on our manner of feeling and seeing ourselves and the world as depicted in the thickness of the imagining scene.

# 3. Reason, Language, and Truth

The notion that the metaphoricity of language undergirds our understanding of the world immediately calls the classical concept of truth into question. The accomplice of the representative

Ricoeur accordingly asks whether a style of thought more subversive than that of Heidegger's would "support the universal suspicion of Western metaphysics with a more heightened suspicion directed at what in metaphor itself is left unsaid" (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 284). For him, the "claim to keep semantic analysis within a metaphysically neutral area only expresses ignorance of the simultaneous play of unacknowledged metaphysics and worn-out metaphors" (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 284).

illusion, the alleged adequation of an interior mental image with some external thing gives rise to the metaphysical specter of truth. Moreover, by imposing the principle of denomination's primacy, semiotic conceptions inflate dead metaphors' effectiveness by placing the creation in language of new meanings under erasure (see Ricoeur, 1977, p. 290). Conversely, the air of rightness of a novel turn of phrase the tenor and tone of which is befitting in a singularly distinctive way bears out Aristotle's insight that the "greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor" (Aristotle (I459a) 1947, p. 657). Previously, I noted how the metaphorical attribution of non-literal predicates to a subject advances the work of language by augmenting the semantic fields in which subjects and predicates figure. The word (logos) that Gadamer elsewhere tells us brings the matter under discussion to a stand here is concentrated in a metaphorical utterance. By placing literal references in suspense, the initial semantic impertinence of non-literal predicates opens the space for redescribing the real in light of a metaphorical statement's heuristic fiction. The closed world of play, which Gadamer reminds us in the case of a theatrical performance lets down its fourth wall so as to be open to its audience, is the corollary analogue of the productive role performed by this metaphorical operation. The advent of meaning that in metaphor augments the field of our understanding thus at the same time constitutes an event in which the truth of the metaphorical utterance advances the work of language.

That the fertile power of metaphorical attribution is the ground of our capacity to say and to think more sets language's inexhaustible dimension in relief. All creation, Heidegger reminds us, is a "bringing forth" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 58) of aspects or features of existence that previously were hidden. For him, the work of art consequently has its origin in setting truth to work. Ricoeur in a related vein remarks that all "creation, all  $\pi oi\eta \sigma \iota \varsigma$  [poiisis], is an effect of Eros" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 10). Eros accordingly inheres in every work born from desire. Gadamer moreover stresses that "all artistic creation challenges us to listen to the language in

which the work of art speaks and to make it our own" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 39; see p. 46). Idealist aesthetics' failure "to appreciate that we typically encounter art as a unique manifestation of truth whose particularity cannot be surpassed" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 37) obfuscates the claim that each work makes. According to Gadamer, translating *aletheia* as "openness" best captures the sense in which something that shows itself as it is, is true. Just as works refashion our ways of thinking, feeling, and conducting our lives in accordance with the worlds to which they singularly give expression, metaphor's redescription of the real lies at the heart of the work of language thanks to the predicative operation that draws a new meaning from the semantic ruins of a literally nonsensical statement.

In view of the fundamental metaphoricity that Gadamer maintains animates the work of language, we might wonder whether we must renounce reason, meaning, and truth in favor of the endless play of differences and deferrals that is the hallmark of the "wandering of the semantic" (Derrida, 1982, p. 241). This différance, which Derrida insists is irreducible to any ontological or theological appropriation, opens "the space in which ontotheology—philosophy—produces its system and its history, . . . inscribing it and exceeding it without return" (Derrida, 1982, p. 6). For him, "the tracing of différance . . . no more follows the lines of philosophicallogical discourse than that of its symmetrical and integral inverse, empirical-logical discourse" (Derrida, 1982, p. 7). From his standpoint, "the concept of play keeps itself beyond this opposition" (Derrida, 1982, p. 7) of philosophical-logical and empirical-logical discourses. At the same time, we could ask whether the "unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end" (Derrida, 1982, p. 7) that for Derrida supplants these discourses obviates the work of metaphor in schematizing the meaning displayed in the thickness of the imagining scene. Freed from metaphysical pretenses, the metaphoricity of language emerges as the poetic nucleus of the *logos* and the spring of reason and truth. Reality, Gadamer reminds us, "always stands in a horizon of desired or feared or, at any rate, still undecided future possibilities" (Gadamer, 1989,

p. 112). That we live in metaphoricity is accordingly only the condition for the fact that we are able to think more, to feel differently, and to act in new ways. Metaphor's ontological vehemence, by which I mean the impact it has in augmenting iconically our ways of seeing the world and inhering in it, draws its force from the felicitous manner in which this poetic creation brings its novel meaning into the open. Derrida tells us that "[o]ne can expose only that which at a certain moment . . . can be shown, presented as something present, a being-present in its truth, in the truth of a present or the presence of the present" (Derrida, 1982, pp. 5–6). Nothing, however, compels us to reduce the present to some presence made present by an allegedly inviolate representational act. We could therefore ask whether the "state of availability, between the nonmeaning preceding language (which has a meaning) and the truth of language which would say the thing such as it is in itself, in act, properly" (Derrida, 1982, p. 241; cf. Gadamer, 2001, pp. 61–628) in which différance places signification only disables the capacity for truth and error that in statements or metaphorical utterances bears on our ability to apprehend the exigencies and demands of the situations in which we find ourselves and to respond in morally and politically responsible ways.

Dismantling the faith in reason that Gadamer maintains is the underlying conviction of various programs of enlightenment by deconstructing the field in which the primary philosophemes (eidos, logos, and theoria, for instance) is one staging ground for overthrowing the anthropological illusion that raises humankind up as a new absolute; the universality of the hermeneutical situation in which we find ourselves is another. To be sure, a critique that "is capable of unmasking the unthought conjunction of hidden metaphysics and worn-out metaphor" (Ricoeur, 1977, 285) lays waste to the hubris that language is the means of taking possession of the

<sup>8</sup> Commenting on his 1981 conversation with Derrida, Gadamer remarks that "[to] be sure, there are boundary lines between us, and the boundary, although it is probably not a definite one, is that Derrida sees both Heidegger and myself as part of the logocentrist camp" (Gadamer, 2001, p. 62).

world. Conversely, Gadamer's insistence that "[r]eason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 276) is the *vis-à-vis* of the hermeneutical precept that the world comes to language through the medium in which it is expressed. Reason, he accordingly tells us, "is not its own master but remains constantly dependent upon the circumstances in which it operates" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 276). Our situatedness within the traditions to which we belong, our finite perspectives, and our horizonal understandings thus make the idea of absolute reason a historical impossibility that for us is forever out of reach.

The notion that reason is in some way the hallmark of the universal thus seems at first to fly in the face of a philosophical hermeneutics for which our historical finitude is a fundamental condition. What, Gadamer asks, is reason if not the capacity to identify with the universal through the formation of one's sense of the world? Reason "that serves the classical scientia pratica et politica" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 46) is not the presuppositionless ideal championed by the Enlightenment when it proclaimed to free reason from all prejudice in this regard. Rather, this reason is one for which the cultivation of "one's own capacity of judgment" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 120) promotes the common good. Hannah Arendt's critique of the failure of those who blindly obeyed the orders of the Nazi regime to think for themselves lays bare the central moral question of the postwar trials of war criminals, namely are human beings "capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment" (Arendt, 1992, pp. 294-95)? For her, "no rules existed [under which] . . . the unprecedented" (Arendt, 1992, p. 295) horrors of monstrous acts could be subsumed. Under such conditions, only by thinking and judging for themselves were those few capable of acting in accordance with an idea of humanity in defense of the dignity of and respect owed to all persons<sup>9</sup>. Reason's repudiation of its absolute claim to "fulfill the thought of the unconditioned" (Ricoeur,

<sup>9</sup> Ricoeur remarks that Sittlichkeit "did not prevent Nazism" (Ricoeur, 2020, p. 9). Rather, only "the Moralität of some people, like [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer and others, based on a certain idea of human beings" (Ricoeur, 2020, p. 9), resisted the depravity of this world-destroying conflagration.

1995, p. 213) here liberates the capacity to respond to exigencies and demands in ways befitting the situation from an abstract ethics of duty, which for Ricoeur is the dead part of Kant's system. The fruit of the ability to think more and to judge well, exemplary deeds and acts that reply to moral and political dilemmas and crises in singularly appropriate ways inscribe ideals and values that we espouse in the practical field of human affairs. Such deeds and acts become manifest indices of reason's historical specificity through testifying to the good, the right, and the just we seek. The only desirable objects of thought, these "loveable things" (Arendt, 1978, p. 179; see Arendt, 1996, p. 9; Arendt, 2003, p. 145) for Arendt consequently inhere in the examples we choose to apply to the situations in which we are called upon to judge for ourselves.

That the fittingness of deeds and acts as regards specific circumstances and situations should be the touch-stone for an inquiry into the relation between reason, truth, and the universal finds an apt corollary in Gadamer's remarks on Aristotle's philosophical ethics. The crux of this ethics, Gadamer explains, "lies in the mediation between logos and ethos, [that is,] between the subjectivity of knowing and the substance of being" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 29). Hence, for him, "[m] oral knowledge does not climax in courage, justice, and so on, but rather in the concrete application that determines in the light of such knowledge what should be done here and now" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 29<sup>10</sup>). This concrete application of the knowledge acquired through moral instruction only shows itself to be right or true in the action taken. By "enabling one to hit upon the mean and achieve the concretization," phronesis—a virtue that according to Aristotle cannot be taught—"shows that something can be done (πρακτὰον αγαθον)" (Gadamer 1999, p. 30). At the same time, Gadamer stresses that "Aristotle's last pronouncement concerning what is right consists in the vague phrase 'as befits it' ( $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \delta \epsilon \hat{\imath}$ )" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 29). For

<sup>10</sup> According to Gadamer, Aristotle's "analysis of phronesis recognizes that moral knowledge is a way of moral being itself . . . . Moral knowledge . . . discerns . . . what a situation requires . . . and . . . what is doable on the basis of a conviction that the concrete situation is related to what is considered right and proper in general" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 29).

"what is 'fitting,' what is 'proper,' what is 'good and right'" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 30) remains a matter of discernment and deliberation.

In view of the multicultural fabric of modern democracies, and in light of the competing and conflicting claims of diverse communities and groups, the matter of the fitting or proper course of action to be taken to address social and political quandaries and problems is open to question and debate. By supplanting the recourse to violence, public discourse in principle preserves the space for the exchange of opinions and ideas critical to the process of public will formation. Dialogue here takes the place of the power one group exercises over another by imposing its will through force. Whether it takes the form of systemic inequities in the distribution of social advantages and disadvantages, of social goods such as educational and employment opportunities, housing and food security, and healthcare, or whether it promotes the moral harm couched in the refusal to recognize others as subjects of rights, violence destroys the power that arises from the body politic so long as people act together. Logos, Gadamer reminds us, "is not 'reason' but 'discourse'. . . . disposed toward the unity of a sense" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 4) that takes shape through the play of question and answer through which the exchange of ideas and opinions unfolds. The right word spoken responsibly is like an exemplary act in this regard. Words chosen for their aptness or suitability are the "right means" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 7) for raising the communality of the members of the body politic into speech. Consequently, for Gadamer, "the word, as the right means, belongs to the common world" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 7). Moreover, "the world of ends itself is correctly defined only as what is suitable and useful to all in common, the koine *sympheron*, as the Greeks said" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 7). However much the word (logos) is discourse and not reason, reason's operative role thus inexorably inheres in the word that rings true because it befits the matter at hand 11.

<sup>11</sup> Gadamer in this regard remarks that "'[t]alking well' (eu legein) has always had two meanings; it is not merely a rhetorical ideal. It also means saying the right thing—i.e., the truth—and is not just the art of speaking—of saying something well) (Gadamer, 1989, p. 19; italics added).

Attributing reason's inscription in history to words, deeds, acts, and lives that stand as ripostes to moral or political dilemmas, quandaries, or crises ultimately sets the truth to which these exemplary words, deeds, acts, and lives attest within the realm of human affairs. Analogous to a work's worlding power, exemplary words, deeds, and acts are promissory signs that refashion the real through surpassing it from within. What is right, good, and just in situations demanding a response becomes manifest only in those deeds, acts, and lives that give the rule by exemplifying it. The right word, too, unsettles frozen expectations and habits of thought thanks to the creative impetus of the work of language. The right word, exemplary deeds and acts, and works that break new paths for thinking, feeling, and acting stand as testament to our ability to reply to exigencies and demands in imaginatively productive ways. The hermeneutical vis-à-vis of our finite historical existence, this power to answer the demands of the situations in which we find ourselves is the spring of the truth that in words, deeds, and acts shines forth in the examples they set and that we can follow after.

# 4. *Bildung*, the Efficacy of History, and the Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem

By taking deeds and acts befitting the situation as the springs of reason's inscription in history, I propose now to set the universality of the hermeneutical problem against the backdrop of the failure of a system of thought that dares to elevate itself to the level of the absolute. For a philosophy that purportedly brings the reconciliation at work in the successive phases of Spirit's self-actualization to its conclusion, equating the rational with the real is the inevitable corollary of this philosophical system's totalizing claim. The Hegelian philosophy of history's loss of credibility in turn lays bare the gap between past accomplishments and as yet unrealized hopes and aspirations. From this vantage point, the horizon of future possibilities that Gadamer reminds us is as much a part of our reality as are our cultural inheritances sets the hermeneutical condition of our experience of history in relief. This experience, Gadamer stresses, is first one in

which our belonging to a tradition or traditions precedes any methodological objectification of the past. Historical consciousness, he points out moreover, only "knows . . . about the past in its otherness" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 360). A consciousness that claims to transcend its historical situatedness allegedly perfects historical experience by mastering the past. The dialectical illusion that here stands in the place of the Enlightenment's unattainable ideal subsequently masks this historical consciousness's self-alienation from the experience of belonging that it vehemently denies. Hence, for Gadamer, anyone "who reflects [them self] . . . out of a living relation to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 360; original in italics) by uprooting themselves from it.

That this living relation to one's cultural inheritances preserved through the act of handing down and taking up values, practices, rituals, and rites through the generations is the conditio per quam of the ability to judge for oneself what is good, right, and just sets the cultivation of one's sensibilities and powers of discretion against the Enlightenment ideal of reason. The cultura animi about which Cicero first spoke places its mark on the care and concern that for Arendt is directed toward the world and that for Gadamer reverberates in this new concept of cultura as "cultivation (Bildung) toward humanity" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 10; see Arendt, 1968, p. 213). The agrarian activities of toil and harvest point to the creation and maintenance of a home that is fit for human habitation. We could accordingly ask whether only a mind trained to tend and take care of the world could assume the task of "rising to the universal" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 12) that Gadamer explains for Hegel "covers the essential character of human rationality as a whole" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 12). By abandoning oneself to one's own particularity, proclivities, and predilections, one otherwise remains "ungebildet ('unformed')" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 12; italics added). Conversely, cultivating one's sensibilities and powers of discretion liberates one from one's private concerns in order to judge from the vantage point of an enlarged way of thinking.

That the concept of *Bildung's* anthropological presuppositions are at the same time the requisite condition of reason's inscription in history places the relation between this cultivation of one's powers of discretion and the ability to respond to exigencies and demands in prudent ways on stage. Overcoming our particularity through "rising to a higher universality" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 305) is accordingly for Gadamer a principal tenet of the hermeneutics of our historical condition. Gadamer consequently stresses that the "historical movement of human life . . . is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 304). Rather, the horizons of the past, like the horizons of our expectations, are constantly changing. We only find ourselves in the situations we do at all thanks to the heritages and traditions that play a part in shaping these horizons, which delimit our singular vantage points at the same time that they mark out our current vistas. The points at which we stand are the zero-degrees of our openness to all the signs of humanity manifest in works and acts rooted in and drawing on traditions other than our own. From each of our respective vantage points, the process of cultivating an enlarged way of thinking is thus always already operative in acquiring the "superior breadth of vision" (Gadamer 1989, p. 305) that anyone seeking to understand another person or another's world must have.

The impossibility of attaining some absolute vantage point from which to master the effects of the past as they bear on our present and future brings to the fore the critical role *Bildung* plays with respect to one's ability to think and to judge for oneself. The power that "in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general" (Kant, 1987, p. 160), as Kant says, presupposes a common sense (*sensus communis*) that is shared by everyone. According to Kant, in order to avoid mistaking our subjective perspectives for objective ones, we put "ourselves in the position of everyone else" (Kant, 1987, p. 160) by comparing our judgments with those that others might possibly make. Three principles and their maxims ac-

cordingly obtain: "(1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and (3) to think always consistently" (Kant, 1987, p. 160). Thinking for oneself liberates one from prejudice, the greatest of which for Kant is superstition. Reflecting on one's "own judgment from a *universal standpoint*" (Kant, 1987, p. 161; original emphasis) is the mark of a broadened way of thinking. Thinking consistently is the maxim of reason. Calling taste a *sensus communis* as regards "our ability to judge a priori the communicability" (Kant, 1987, p. 162) of feelings evoked by a given presentation consequently compels us to consider how the superior breadth of vision that is the fruit of one's openness to new experiences bears on the formation of the person and their capacity to judge for them self *as if* from the standpoint of all.

That the self's liberation from its predilections and private perspectives is the requisite condition of the ability to think as if from the standpoint of everyone places the power of judgment on stage. This liberation from subjective constraints would seem to be the conditio per quam of an enlarged mentality. At the same time, we cannot overlook how by relying on the communicability of judgments of taste in drawing a theory of political judgment from Kant's Third Critique, Arendt opens the door to a broader consideration of the role reflective judgment plays in the field of action. The conjunction of the work of art's singularity and the communicability of the experience occasioned by it authorizes laterally transposing aesthetic judgment onto the moral and political planes. Furthermore, setting historical spectators' regard for historical events against the judgments of historical agents who commit themselves to a course of action in response to the exigencies of the situations in which they find themselves illumines the difference between the formers' retrospective views and the prospective and even prophetic dimensions of the initiatives moral agents and political actors take. Rising to the universal is tantamount to acquiring an enlarged mentality only under the condition that the sensus communis vesting a community, a people, or humanity with its concrete universality promotes the common

good (see Gadamer, 1989, p. 21<sup>12</sup>). Only then does overcoming our subjective predilections play a formative role in cultivating our ability to think and to judge for ourselves *as if* from the standpoint of everyone.

By setting the cultivation of this capacity to think and to judge for oneself within the ambit of the hermeneutical problem, I mean to draw out the concept of *Bildung's* significance for Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment and its conception of reason. For him, the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment—namely, "the prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 270)—endows reason with its absolute authority as the sole arbiter of freedom and truth by denying tradition its power. Faith in perfection—the vehicle for the "conquest of mythos by logos" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 273)—however, only dissembles the dogmatically abstract contrast between them. Magic's alleged retreat from the world, which in the dialectical reversal of the Enlightenment that for Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer irrupted unchecked in the barbarism of the Nationalist Socialist regime, ostensibly ratified the confidence in progress won through rational knowledge (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979). Yet, we might wonder whether conceiving the idea of reason as "the instrument for understanding the ends, [and] determining them" (Horkheimer, 1974, p. 10; original emphasis) rather than an instrument for regulating means-ends relations, as Horkheimer claims, does justice to the hermeneutical situation in which reason is operative. By the same token, Adorno's negative dialectic provides no way out of the performative contradiction in which it ensnares itself (Adorno 1973; see Habermas 1987, p. 119). Gadamer for his part maintains that "European optimism about progress and bourgeois cultural idealism" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 27)—the legacy of the Enlightenment confidence in reason—could not survive the First World War's technological slaughter. For him, the wholesale adoption of systems of progres-

<sup>12</sup> Gadamer consequently stresses that "the most important thing in education is . . . the training in the *sensus communis* (Gadamer, 1989, p. 20; italics added).

sive industrialization along with technological advances in modern weaponry pose a catastrophic threat not just to a now "endangered self-consciousness" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 28; see Gadamer, 2004, p. 141) but also to life itself on earth. That the future path of humanity charted by technological inventions is "just as [vacuously] utopian as the moral confidence of the first age of Enlightenment" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 28) vacates reason's historical specificity and the force the present has as regards the initiatives we take. As such, the universal leveling of our diverse cultural inheritances in the interest of rationalizing all facets of human endeavors enshrines itself as the good to be desired and the object of happiness at the cost of hollowing out the possibility of a "life to which one can say 'yes'" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 36).

The universality of the hermeneutical problem is consequently not only the staging ground for the concept of prejudice's rehabilitation but it also brings to the fore the concept of Bildung's moral and political bearing. Gadamer explains that Heidegger's existential analysis of Dasein admits of no particular historical ideal as regards existence. Rather, grounding fundamental ontology transcendentally in the analytic of Dasein uncovers the existential significance of the structure of Care. According to Gadamer, Heidegger's "existential analytic itself does not, with respect to its own intention, contain any existentiell ideal and therefore cannot be criticized as one" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 263). Contrariwise, Ricoeur points out that Heidegger's quest for authenticity could not "be carried out without a constant appeal to the testimony of the existentiell" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 65). He accordingly asks whether it is "not within a categorical analysis, heavily influenced by the recoil effect of the existential on the existential, that death is held to be our utmost possibility, even our ownmost potentiality, inherent in the essential structure of Care" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 67). Relating time's authentic structure to that of Care posits the "requirement of 'Being-a-whole' (Ganzsein)" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 64) from which the question of temporality proceeds. The "unavoidable interference ... between the existential and the "existential" (Ricoeur, 1988,

p. 64) accordingly places its mark on the analytic of Dasein's Being-a-whole. The narrative quality conferred on a life through gathering incidents and events together in a story is the synthetic rejoinder to Dasein's ecstatic structure as "thrown projection" (Gadamer 1989, p. 264). Gadamer further remarks that "Dasein that projects itself on its own potentiality-for-being has always already 'been'" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 264). The historicity of Dasein's fundamental constitution consequently inheres in the way that Dasein "mediates itself to itself understandingly" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 96). The idea of the person as *for them self*, which for Kant animates the moral imperative of respect, is thus the practical—that is, moral—correlate of the capacity of each to insert them self in the world through their words, deeds, and acts.

The claim raised by the concept of *Bildung* is therefore an anthropological possibility that, as Koselleck reminds us, we cannot ignore. The equality and distinctiveness that Arendt attributes to the political condition of human plurality presupposes that persons "can only be and become . . . [themselves] . . . through . . . [their] individuation" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 181). The narrative identity of the "who" disclosed through speaking and acting is from this standpoint the fruit of our ability to exercise our capacities and powers. Bildung, Koselleck accordingly stresses "does not lead to contemplative passivity but instead always necessitates communicative achievements, leading to the vita activa" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 181). For him, the sociability of individuals in the groups to which they belong is an effect of the process of formation through which they become educated in ways of conducting their lives. Bildung is thus no "mere imagination of those who take themselves for educated (Gebildete)" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 170; see Gadamer 1998, p. 119). Nor does it place itself under the tutelage of the Enlightenment, which as "an anthropologically derivable mission of self-determination, [was] undertaken in accordance with reason and with ethically, socially, or politically redeemable norms" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 179). Rather, as a metaconcept, Bildung is irreducible to any one heritage, tradition, or cultural exemplification, since the processes of formation, cultivation, and education to which this metaconcept's semantic complexity and richness refer are operative in all the diverse histories and traditions of the world's cultures. The wealth of cultural expressions of humanity stands as testament to the multiplicity of the ways in which different cultural groups and historical communities preserve the living relation between inherited traditions and as yet unfulfilled aspirations. Koselleck emphasizes that any "ideal-typical essential features [of the metaconcept of Bildung]. . . are [therefore only] contained in that conduct of life which is always moving on the path of self-discovery" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 184). This movement marks the achievements of the self-understandings won through availing ourselves of the experiences afforded through our engagements with works, texts, and our and others' histories and traditions. The universality of the hermeneutical problem consequently takes on its broader significance in light of those seemingly limitless cultural and historical contexts and situations in which the demand to understand better, to think more, and to judge well as if from the standpoint of everyone arises.

In order to draw out how these remarks on *Bildung* bear on the question of reason's concrete specificity, I want to accentuate the significance that Gadamer places on the efficacy of history. History, he reminds us, "is only present to us in light of our futurity" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9). By the same token, for him there "can be no doubt that the great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear" (Gadamer, 1976, pp. 8–9). Even our availability for and openness to new experiences is for him necessarily determined by the hold that the past exerts on us. His provocative formulation—that "[it] is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9<sup>13</sup>) sets the scope of the hermeneutical problem in

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer explains that he is using this provocative formulation "to restore to its rightful place a concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and the English Enlightenment (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9).

relief. For a consciousness subject to the effects of history (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein), every assertion can thus only be "understood as an answer to a question" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 11; see p. 13). This hermeneutical Urphänomen is an insuperable feature of our historical condition. At the same time, thanks to the hermeneutical function of imagination, which "serves the sense of what is questionable" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 12) biases that orient our perspectives can be cast into doubt. That our prejudices "constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 9) thematizes the efficacy of history (Wirkungsgeschichte) as the unsurpassable condition of our finite existence. Ricoeur's construction of a dialectic between the efficacy of the past and the critique of ideologies in response to Jürgen Habermas's objections reserves a place for this ontology of prior understanding. The eschatology of nonviolence that in this dialectic takes the place of the critique of ideologies thus reinvigorates the relation between the horizon of the past and that of our expectations (see Ricoeur, 1981, p. 87). We could accordingly ask whether rising to the universal through overcoming our particular predilections as Gadamer maintains in fine has a counterpart in the realization of our "plural and collective unity" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 138). For is this rising to the universal not in the end also the sign of the hope of the oneness of humanity realized through the movement of communication among diverse historical communities and groups?

Does the mutual illumination of the concepts of *Bildung* and *Geschichte* (history) that Koselleck maintains constitutes a genuine linguistic contribution to rendering experiences in revolutionary nineteenth-century Europe meaningful ultimately draw the discourse of reason into the orbit of a hermeneutical reflection on these concepts' moral and political implications (Koselleck, 2002, p. 175)? Previously, I attributed reason's inscription in history to the initiatives agents take in response to the exigencies and demands of the situations in which they find themselves. Aristotle's vague phrase concerning what is right—"as befits it"—underlines

the fact that reason is not its own master as Gadamer maintains but is instead bound up with and in that sense remains dependent upon the particular circumstances in which we are called upon to think, judge, and act. The exemplary value of deeds, acts, and lives that we admire is the mark of their fittingness both as answers they provide to problems, dilemmas, or crises and models that we can follow. Bildung, which according to Koselleck gains its historical profile only in the social and political contexts in which the process of reflexive self-formation take place, thus has a critical role to play. For the demand from which the concept of *Bildung* initially sprang—namely, the "demand to . . . conduct one's life in society in a responsible way" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 207),—is at the same time the vis-à-vis of the freedom inhering in the capacity to begin something new. Thanks to the practical wisdom that in situations calling for it is manifest in distinguishing right from wrong, words, deeds, and acts that stand as fitting rejoinders to social, moral, and political challenges set their exemplary effects in the course of human affairs. In cases where no good choice is available, the "terrible immensity of the consequences that flow from a guilty deed" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 132) bears out the tragic dimension of our mortal existence. The inexorable role that dialogue as Gadamer conceives it plays in the ongoing processes of our self-formation is a perennial reminder that we only surpass the given order from within. Koselleck cautions that "if the outmoded-sounding Persönlichkeitsbildung ('building of character") . . . is today called into question" (Koselleck, 2002, p. 207), we should not forget that ideology critiques and social diagnoses mask the critic's self-surrender. Rising up to the idea of humanity as a genuine universal depends on Bildung, which as a historical idea sets reason within the practical field of our experiences. That reason is not its own master is consequently the surest indication of the responsibility we have to conduct our lives in a manner befitting the being that we are.

# 5. Closing Reflections

The medial relation between *ethos* and *logos* that Gadamer remarks constitutes the crux of Aristotle's ethics provides a unique point of access to the problematic stemming from the fact that we are not one individual, people, or historical community but many. Elsewhere, I have attributed the force of the enigma of our plural and collective unity to the virulence of the aporia unleashed by the loss of credibility of the Hegelian philosophy of history (Savage, 2021). I said then that the multiplicity of ways that communities and groups preserve the living tension between different spaces of experiences and diverse horizons of expectations at first appears to confound the notion that humanity can be considered as a collective singular only insofar as it has one history for which it is the subject. Equating the rational and the real within Hegel's speculative system obviates the force the present has as the "time of initiative" (see Ricoeur, 1998, pp. 230–40). That reason appears as an "infinite force . . . that produces the circumstances for its own realization" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 194) folds the work of the negative into a system of thought for which only reminiscence and recapitulation remains. The renewed attention Gadamer gives to prejudice provides a fecund starting point for renewing the thought of history and time in this regard. For a hermeneutical consciousness instructed by the experience of being affected by the past, the efficacy of history is the touchstone of an ontology that expressly thematizes this fundamental experience of belonging to a history of which we are a part.

The accent Gadamer places on the linguisticality of experience counterpoints this ontology of a prior understanding. In the course of my reflections above, I commented on how the truth of the word that in dialogue comes to expression through the play of questions and answers operates within the field of metaphorical attribution. The metaphoricity of language, I indicated then, constitutes the poetic nucleus of the *logos*. That the right word befits the situation calling for it dispels the fascination with deconstructing the representative illusion and its metaphysics of presence. Rather, like the worlds to which literary works, poetic and musical com-

positions, and works of art give a figure and a body, the right word augments the field of our understanding by casting the real in a new light. The language that a work speaks is expressly manifest in the communicability of the experience occasioned by it. Thanks to the productivity of language, not only works but dialogue, too, transcends the given order of existence by reason of the truth that it brings into the open.

By turning to the notion that *ethos* is not *logos*, I would like to offer a final comment on history and reason in light of the universality of the hermeneutical problem. In view of Gadamer's remark that "[h]uman reason is determined by actual ethos" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 74), we might wonder whether the diversity of cultural traditions that today is the hallmark of multicultural societies shipwrecks the hope of humanity's plural and collective unity. The "'reasonableness' (phronesis)" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 74) that Gadamer attributes to the insight that illumines the requirements of a situation demanding a response is one that he opposes to some universally valid knowledge. He tells us that, contra Socrates, for Aristotle "Arete is not Logos but rather μετὰ λόγου" (Gadamer 1999, p. 74; see p. 33). Everything, Gadamer accordingly stresses, "depends upon one's coming to a decision in the particular formation of one's own moral being (hexis)" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 74<sup>14</sup>). From this standpoint, the theoretical universality of values drawn from situationless abstractions are forever out of reach. The equivalence between "becoming socialized through education and training and the logos of justification (Rechenschaftsbage)" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 143; italics added to logos) that for Gadamer is implied by the connection between ethos and logos in the Socratic question of the good thus at the same time roots ethos and logos in the cultural heritages that different communities and groups claim as their own.

The diversity of cultural heritages and traditions in which notions of the good, the right, and the just expressly figure con-

<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the "zero degree of being formed by a binding ethos—which is the only way to do justice to the concept of value and its claim to ontological absoluteness—is an illusory phantasm of theoretical reason" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 75).

sequently gives the full measure of the challenge of rising to the universal that the movement of communication makes possible. Liberated from the grip of totalizing pretensions, reason's concrete historical specificity is bound up with the ways that these heritages and traditions bear on historical communities' and cultural groups' expectations, aspirations, and demands. The truth to which expressions of humanity rooted in different cultural traditions lay claim marks out the potential field in which intercultural understanding might yet be possible. In this dialogical situation, rising to the universal poses a hermeneutical challenge. Our plural and collective unity can only be won by putting our personal predilections and the received wisdom of our cultural inheritances to the test. Far from relativizing reason and truth, this acknowledgment of the multiplicity of the histories and traditions to which we and others belong opens the space for intercultural dialogue in quest of a better understanding of others and ourselves.

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# CAPÍTULO VII / CHAPTER VII MEANING AND EVOLUTION

Mirela Oliva

#### **RESUMEN**

El libro reciente de David Haig, From Darwin to Derrida. Selfish Genes, Social Selves, and the Meanings of Life propone una hermenéutica darwiniana concerniente al significado de la evolución. En su perspectiva, los principios hermenéuticos de historicidad, interpretación y significado gobiernan a todos los seres vivos, no solo a los humanos. Haig hace referencia a Gadamer y Derrida y describe a los seres vivos como intérpretes y al proceso evolutivo como una interpretación que involucra información genética. Este capítulo discute la propuesta de Haig desde una perspectiva gadameriana. Primero, muestro que la atribución de historicidad, interpretación y significado a los seres vivos es coherente con la definición aristotélica de los seres vivos como automovientes. La hermenéutica alemana heredó la biología de Aristóteles y le añadió la discusión de la historia. Segundo, analizo los principios hermenéuticos de los seres vivos visibles en la evolución. Los seres vivos tienen una temporalidad peculiar a través de su automovimiento porque el cambio es parte

de su identidad. Presento dos nociones hermenéuticas en este contexto: el círculo hermenéutico y la narrativa. Luego, muestro que este carácter histórico implica interpretar información y perseguir significados. La autorrealización de los seres vivos es propositiva y requiere novedad. Finalmente, respondo a la objeción de Gary Tomlinson de que el significado es creado solo por seres vivos dotados de percepción y cognición.

Palabras clave: significado, vida, evolución, interpretación, información, hermenéutica.

#### **ABSTRACT**

David Haig's recent book From Darwin to Derrida. Selfish Genes, Social Selves, and the Meanings of Life proposes a Darwinian hermeneutics concerned with the meaning of evolution. In his view, the hermeneutic principles of historicity, interpretation, and meaning govern all living beings, not just humans. Haig refers to Gadamer and Derrida and describes living beings as interpreters and the evolutionary process as an interpretation involving genetic information. This paper discusses Haig's proposal from a Gadamerian perspective. I first show that the attribution of historicity, interpretation, and meaning to living beings is coherent with Aristotle's definition of living beings as self-movers. German hermeneutics inherited Aristotle's biology and added to it the discussion of history. Second, I analyze the hermeneutic principles of living beings visible in evolution. Living beings have a peculiar temporality through their self-movement because change is part of their identity. I present two hermeneutic notions in this context: the hermeneutic circle and narrative. Then, I show that this historical character entails interpreting information and pursuing meaning. The self-fulfillment of living beings is purposive and requires novelty. Finally, I respond to Gary Tomlinson's objection that meaning is only created by living beings endowed with perception and cognition.

**Keywords:** meaning, life, evolution, interpretation, information, hermeneutics.

#### 1. Introduction

In the last decades, natural scientists opened their inquiry to philosophical questions about the meaning of life and the universe. Does the universe have a purpose? How is life connected with the rest of the universe? What does evolution entail for the meaning of human life? Paul Davies, Sean Carroll, Edward O. Wilson, Marcelo Gleiser, Sabine Hossenfelder, and John Polkinghorne, to name just a few, examined these questions in books that bridge the gap between science and philosophy. The existential turn in science capitalized on the universalization of meaning, which, throughout the history of philosophy, evolved from a linguistic notion to a notion applicable to all things (Oliva, 2022). David Haig's recent book From Darwin to Derrida. Selfish Genes, Social Selves, and the Meanings of Life (2020) draws from the hermeneutic tradition to clarify the notion of meaning and apply it to all living beings. Haig, an evolutionary biologist, proposes a Darwinian hermeneutics concerned with the meaning of evolution. In his view, the hermeneutic principles of historicity, interpretation, and meaning govern all living beings, not just humans. Haig refers to Gadamer and Derrida and describes living beings as interpreters and the evolutionary process as an interpretation involving genetic information. This paper discusses Haig's proposal from a Gadamerian perspective. I first show that the attribution of historicity, interpretation, and meaning to living beings is coherent with Aristotle's definition of living beings as self-movers. German hermeneutics inherited Aristotle's biology and added to it the discussion of history. Second, I analyze the hermeneutic principles of living beings visible in evolution. Living beings have a peculiar temporality through their self-movement because change is part of their identity. I present two hermeneutic notions in this context: the hermeneutic circle and narrative. Then, I show that this historical character entails interpreting information and pursuing meaning. The self-fulfillment of living beings is purposive and requires novelty. Finally, I respond to Gary Tomlinson's objection that meaning is only created by living beings endowed with perception and cognition.

# 2. From Aristotle to hermeneutics: life as self-movement

In asking about the meaning of evolution, Haig appeals to two main philosophical streams: (1) Aristotelian metaphysics and philosophy of nature, especially the definition of life and the fourfold causation at work in evolution; (2) hermeneutics, which provides the semantic and historical approach. Gathering these two schools is, however, more than just an opportune juxtaposition. The hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition is the main heir of Aristotle's biology in contemporary philosophy. Starting with Kant, continuing with Hegel and Nietzsche, and culminating in Heidegger and his students, German philosophy upheld Aristotle's view of life as purposive spontaneity. While modern science discarded the Aristotelian paradigm, favoring a mechanistic model, many German philosophers did not endorse this shift and maintained Aristotle's fundamental biological insights<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, Heidegger was a pivotal figure. His philosophy of Being owed a substantial debt to Aristotle's view of living beings, as is apparent both in his interpretative studies of Aristotle and his works on phenomenology and metaphysics. Heidegger analyzed Aristotle's conception of living beings in *On the Soul* in several seminars at the University of Freiburg<sup>2</sup>. Given this focus, it is no surprise that Heidegger's students and followers (Gadamer, Jonas, Arendt, Derrida, Figal) have employed the Aristotelian notion of life within the new framework of historical consciousness and universalization of meaning.

<sup>1</sup> See Sweet 2023; Ng 2020; Emden 2014; Storey 2015; Figal 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger's seminars on Aristotle's On the Soul were recently presented by Francisco J. Gonzalez in his book Human Life in Motion (2024).

# 2.1 What is life? Aristotle's biology

What ideas of Aristotle attract both contemporary biology and hermeneutics? We should start with Aristotle's definition of life: Life is a special kind of movement, a self-movement. Metabolism and growth, the movement of the blood in the body, and blooming do not have an external cause. Nobody pulls a flower when it blooms; nobody moves my hands while I write this paper, and nobody moves the blood in a tiger. It is true that living requires external conditions and can be helped or impeded by external factors. Living beings need water and sunlight, yet they are not moved by water or sunlight. Somebody can push my hand, but this accidental gesture does not make up the essence of my hand moving, which is fully autonomous: "The change of anything that is changed by itself is natural; that is the case with all animals, for example. For animals are self-movers, and we say that everything which has its own inner source of change is changed naturally. That is why the self-movement of an animal as a whole is natural, but its body may undergo either natural or unnatural movement, depending on the kind of movement it happens to be undergoing and what kind of element the animal consists of" (Ph. 254b15, 196; trans. Waterfield). Not being coordinated from outside, living beings have in themselves the principle of their own movement and are thus free to move in all directions: "And that is why all plants also seem to be living; for they evidently possess in themselves the sort of capacity and principle by which they partake of growth and decline in contrary directions. For things that are constantly nourished throughout their lives as long as they are able to take in nourishment do not grow upward rather than downward, but do so likewise both ways and in every direction" (De An. 413a25, 23, trans. Miller Jr.).

The intrinsic principle of life is the soul, distinct from the body. The soul actualizes and animates the body, making it a living body. The distinction soul-body reproduces, in the living realm, the general distinction between form and matter. For Aristotle, every material being is composed of matter and form. Matter is what something is made of; form is what gives it its identity. The matter

of a bronze statue is bronze; the form is the shape and structure. In the case of living beings, the soul is the form; the body is the matter. Among forms, souls have a peculiar dynamic quality, as they bestow identity and move the body.

Furthermore, self-movement entails unity of heterogeneity. As Étienne Gilson explains, successful self-movement requires heterogeneity (Gilson, 1984, p. 5). There must be different parts that act one on another and thus constitute the overall self-movement. The differentiation of parts must, at the same time, be fully ordered so that living beings move themselves as wholes. The soul coordinates this complex moving heterogeneity: "If now the form of the living being is the soul, or part of the soul, or something that without the soul cannot exist; as would seem to be the case, seeing at any rate that when the soul departs, what is left is no longer an animal, and that none of the parts remain what they were before, excepting in mere configuration, like the animals that in the fable are turned into stone" (*Part. An.* 641a17, 996, trans. Ogle)

Finally, living beings do not move themselves as wholes in a merely repetitive manner that does not result in anything new, like a wheel that rotates indefinitely. Neither do they move to become something else, as if a bird could become a tiger through a somersault. On the contrary, their self-movement aims at the completion of their nature. A flower grows to bloom; an animal grows to become an adult animal. Their purpose is self-fulfillment. Aristotle calls this purposive self-movement an <code>entelecheia</code>—an actuality having (<code>echein</code>) its purpose (<code>telos</code>) in (<code>en</code>) itself (King, 2021, p. 133).

# 2.2 Against mechanistic reductionism

Spontaneity, unified heterogeneity, and purposiveness thus differentiate living beings from non-living ones. These traits contrast with the main setup of modern science in its first centuries, XVII<sup>th</sup> to XIX<sup>th</sup>. At the center of science then was physics (Okasha, 2019, p. 2), which reduced everything to predictability, homogeneity, and mechanic algorithms. That is, it treated living beings as non-living beings. While Aristotle took living beings as exemplars for his philosophy of nature,

modern science reversed the order and focused on non-living things as paradigmatic for the new mechanistic model. Haig begins his book with a criticism of this reductionism. He attributes to Francis Bacon and René Descartes the intellectual responsibility for initiating the break with the Aristotelian model (Haig, 2020, p. 1). Bacon's distinction between physics and metaphysics separated Aristotelian fourfold causes into two domains. Physics must study material and efficient causes, the only one empirically provable. Metaphysics must study final causes (purposes) and formal causes (forms). As we have seen, form and purpose are fundamental to understanding living beings. Self-movement makes no sense absent an intrinsic principle, the form. Likewise, self-movement without purpose cannot account for the growth and completion of living beings. Bacon's blow against formal and final causality implicitly denied the special place of living beings in nature and deprived natural sciences of conceptual tools to understand them. While Bacon's motivation was mainly pragmatic and empirical, Descartes' justification was our incapacity to know God's purposes. For this reason, the final causes cannot be the object of physics.

According to Haig, Bacon's and Descartes' expulsion of purpose and form from physics contributed to the mechanization of biology, even though life sciences maintained teleological and formal explanations here and there. Medicine and physiology still relied on teleology to distinguish between the physiological (normal) and pathological (abnormal); embryologists saw the development of an embryo as oriented toward a final form, and morphologists proposed a science of form that captures the inner structure of animals. In this ambivalent climate, Darwin's evolutionary theory fueled the suspense. On the one hand, Darwin used purposes and forms to explain the evolutionary process: "Thus Darwin explained unity of type by transformation in actual evolutionary time rather than abstract formal space and was able to reconcile similarity of structure with divergence of function" (Haig, 2020, p. 9). On the other hand, Darwin's view on form and function laid the basis for a contrast between the study of embryological development as a

goal-directed process and the study of evolution by natural selection, which does not have a preordained end. In Haig's eyes, this contrast rests on two significations of Aristotle's notion of *telos*: (1) goal — the endpoint toward which a thing moves, and (2) utility — the utilitarian purpose that motivates an action (Haig, 2020, p. 13). The contrast also carries a cultural divide between German morphologists, who viewed the goal as the completion of form, and British naturalists, who preferred the utilitarian function.

Given this convoluted situation of teleology, Haig concludes that contemporary biology is still dominated by mechanistic thinking despite the potential of Darwinian evolutionary theory to revamp the Aristotelian paradigm of formal and final causes. At the heart of mechanistic biology lies the denial of Aristotle's fundamental insight that living beings move themselves to attain their perfection. Physical laws like the conservation of force are invoked to shun the spontaneity and variety of the living realm: "For most mechanists, the conservation of force negated the possibility that organisms could be unmoved movers, capable of arbitrary choices without prior physical cause" (Haig, 2020, p. 15). Although biology uses, willy-nilly, a language that implies final causes when describing physiological or genetic processes, its philosophical self-understanding remains adverse to teleology. Haig's project aims to unveil this deep contradiction in biology and expose the specific nature of living beings and their evolution. Haig reads Darwin's theory through the lens of Gadamer's hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstruction. Their notions of historicity, interpretation, and meaning can effectively combat modern mechanicism and integrate Aristotle's biology within the new framework of evolution and genetic information.

## 2.3. The hermeneutics of life and history

A brief look into Gadamer's discussion of life within the hermeneutic context<sup>3</sup> will help us better situate Haig's proposal. Gadamer

<sup>3</sup> See also Vessey 2018.

rejects the modern mechanistic model and endorses the German philosophy of life indebted to Aristotle. Published in 1960, his main work Truth and Method reveals an access to truth different from the methodological approach of modern science. The scientific methodology does not exhaust knowledge. Modes of experience like art or history communicate a truth that cannot be verified by the methodological means of science. They pertain to the domain of human sciences, which employs understanding and interpretation, not predictive and verificationist thinking. Life is a litmus test for this contrast. Surveying notions of life in German philosophy, Gadamer shows how they differ from the scientific view of the natural world, characterized by fixed and predictable structures. The challenge is to account for this difference without succumbing to the scientific standard of certainty that ultimately reduces living to non-living beings. German philosophy of life focuses especially on human life and identifies its self-movement with historicity. For this reason, the problems of life and history are fully intertwined. Establishing a new form of historical knowledge different from scientific knowledge is tantamount to attempting a knowledge of life within life's flow, not detached from it. In Gadamer's view, this attempt had different results, and some philosophers of life (Count Yorck, Heidegger) were more successful than others (Dilthey, Husserl).

Dilthey and Husserl highlighted the peculiar nature of life in contrast to non-living beings but could not fashion an adequate model of knowledge. Dilthey acknowledged the spontaneity of life and claimed that the self-movement of life is self-expressive, self-reflective, and unified. Meaning emerges from this unified self-expression, an idea that Haig puts at work in his Darwinian hermeneutics, as we will see in the second part. Gadamer appreciates that Dilthey's notion of meaning is nested within concrete life, not a transcendental subject:

The ideality of meaning was not to be located in a transcendental subject, but emerged from the historical reality of life. It is life itself that unfolds and forms itself in intelligible unities, and it is in terms of the single individual that these unities are understood. This is the self-ev-

ident starting point for Dilthey's analysis. The continuity of life as it appears to the individual (and is re-experienced and understood by others through biographical knowledge) is created through the significance of particular experiences (*Erlebnisse*). Around them, as around an organizing center, the unity of a life is created in the same way that a melody acquires its form — not from the mere succession of notes but from the musical motifs that determine its formal unity. (Gadamer, 2003, p. 223)

This description of life's self-expression in meaning contains the recognizable Aristotelian tropes: self-movement, unity, and form. Yet, Gadamer thinks that despite recognizing life's spontaneity, Dilthey ultimately fell prey to his lingering Cartesianism, aiming at a scientific certainty beyond doubt. Dilthey's conviction that life settles in reflective stability lead him to subordinate the irreducible experience of life to scientific knowledge. Scientific certainty surpasses the immanence of life into a standardized, verificationist paradigm:

The kind of certainty afforded by a verification that has passed through doubt is different from the immediate living certainty that all ends and values have when they appear in human consciousness with and absolute claim. But the certainty of science is very different from the certainty acquired in life. Scientific certainty always has something Cartesian about it. It is the result of a critical method that admits only the validity of what cannot be doubted. (Gadamer, 2003, p. 238)

Likewise, Husserl sought to oppose the mechanistic scientific view with the notion of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), the concrete world in which we are immersed prior to any scientific objectivation. The lifeworld is not an immobile totality of fixed things and structures but reflects the historical character of human existence. Invoking the unity of a living organism, Husserl showed that the unity of the flow of experience precedes and conditions discrete experiences. However, instead of working out a kind of knowledge appropriate for this changing reality, he, too, settled on a stable ground, the transcendental consciousness. In doing so, Husserl lost the "genuine

content of the concept of life" (Gadamer, 2003, p. 250), and relied, like Dilthey, on a reflexivity that alienates itself from life.

Gadamer's criticism of Dilthey and Husserl proves that it is not enough to acknowledge the difference between living and non-living beings. One must also find access to living beings different from the knowledge reserved for non-living beings. This kind of knowledge must, in a certain way, mirror organic spontaneity and purposiveness:

What is alive can never be really known by objective consciousness, by the effort of understanding which seeks to penetrate the law of appearances. What is alive is not such that a person could ever grasp it from outside, in its living quality. The only way to grasp life is, rather, to become inwardly aware of it./.../ Only insofar as philosophical reflection corresponds to the structure of being alive does it acquire its own legitimacy. (Gadamer, 2003, p. 253)

Gadamer thinks that Count Yorck and Heidegger best met this requirement, as they proposed a model of knowledge that is purposive and developmental. Count Yorck integrated the Aristotelian framework with Darwin's evolutionary theory. Starting from the idea that life is self-assertion, Yorck captured Darwinian evolution through the term *Urteilung*, primordial division, roughly translated (ur primordial, Teil part). The self-movement of life occurs through division and articulation, a nod to natural selection and adaptation. At the same time, Urteilung means, in German, also judgment. Through this etymological game, Yorck establishes the connection between self-awareness and organic processes. Both occur through (1) projection and (2) abstraction, namely through an incessant movement of (1) purposive self-completion and (2) differentiation from the environment (while assimilating it through energy and food, at the organic level, and existential embedding at the epistemic level).

The historical and projectual nature of life understanding comes to the fore in Heidegger's work. Understanding is not just a knowledge superimposed on life but a human mode of being that engages a person's projects and relationship with the world. A person who understands does not simply acquire information but, in assimilating it, projects herself upon her possibilities. Gadamer insists that the movement of understanding is constituted both by the historicity of the knower and the historicity of the known: "For Heidegger too historical knowledge is not a projection in the sense of a plan, the extrapolation of the aims of the will, an ordering of things according to the wishes, prejudices, or promptings of the powerful; rather, it remains something adapted to the object, a mensuratio ad rem. Yet this thing is not a factum brutum, not something that is merely at hand, something that can simply be established and measured, but it itself ultimately has the same mode of being as Dasein" (Gadamer, 2003, p. 261). Like all vital operations, understanding is constituted by the person's self-movement and the dynamics of the environment.

The knowledge of life must thus reproduce the dynamics of organic being. Hermeneutics moves from the bottom up, from Aristotle's general definition of living beings to the understanding of human life, characterized by historicity and self-reflection. Human existence remains anchored in biology, and Aristotelian categories still apply. Given this connection between hermeneutic understanding and Aristotelian biology, is it possible to go back to all living beings and apply to them hermeneutic principles initially retrieved in human life? As I will show in the next part, Haig moves top-down from hermeneutics to biology.

#### 3. Hermeneutic principles of living beings

Living beings are historical, interpret information, and pursue meaning. Hermeneutics usually attributes these characteristics to human beings only, but Haig believes that they attach also to non-human living beings. Why? Living beings behave like agents because they move themselves to fulfill their nature. Agents have, indeed, goals and pursue them by choosing a certain path whenever the contingency of their development and environment allows for several options. A giraffe could have evolved differently

with a shorter neck, but the higher neck had the strongest adaptive chance. The unified and purposive self-movement of living beings qualifies them as agents, even when they lack the rational deliberation proper to humans. Haig cautions that his application of hermeneutic notions to living beings is not metaphorical but captures a real behavior of living beings, best observable in the process of evolution: "The unintended products of natural selection can likewise be considered agents whose bodies and instinctive behaviors 'anticipate' that what has worked in the past will work in the future" (Haig, 2020, p. xxvi). According to Haig, as unified self-movers, organisms interpret, deliberate, and decide.

While Aristotle and his followers were not as bold as Haig, they acknowledged an incipient form of intentionality and freedom in each living being. First, purposefulness does not require rational deliberation (*Ph.*, II, 8, 199b26–27). A flower moves toward blooming without deliberating about it. Aquinas calls all things that act for an end "agents", even in the absence of deliberation:

We should notice that, although every agent, both natural and voluntary, intends an end, still it does not follow that every agent knows the end or deliberates about the end. To know the end is necessary in those whose actions are not determined, but which may act for opposed ends, as, for example, voluntary agents. Therefore it is necessary that these know the end by which they determine their actions. But in natural agents the actions are determined, hence it is not necessary to choose those things which are for the end. (Aquinas, 2006, p. 19)

Closer to Haig's spirit, Hans Jonas (a student of Heidegger) claims that freedom is already prefigured in the lower living beings, identifying metabolism as the first form of freedom (Jonas, 1996, p. 79). The assimilation of food and energy and their integration into the organism's growth show that the organism is capable of self-renewal while interacting with the environment. Unlike inorganic things like a stone or water, living beings maintain their identity through change. The organic agency is not a perk added to a set of properties but makes up the nature of living beings that need to change in

order to survive. Material variation (change of cells, growth, death of cells) is coordinated by the substantial form, the soul, which ensures the individual persistence of a living being.

It is thus appropriate to consider living beings as agents that behave according to hermeneutic principles, even though non-human agency lacks some traits unique to human beings (rational choice, spiritual relationships with other persons, social solidarity around the common good, etc.). Applying these principles to non-human living beings is analogical and maintains the differences between various kinds of living beings.

#### 3.1 Historicity

All material beings are temporal and perishable. Among them, living beings have a peculiar temporality: Change is part of their identity. A living being survives and flourishes only through change. A stone can remain a stone without any change, yet a flower needs to grow in order to survive and reach its full nature. Its life has stages: germination, growth, flowering. As we saw in the first part, hermeneutics recognized this peculiar temporality of life and refashioned Aristotle's life notion in the context of a reflection on history. German philosophy of life called life's developmental temporality historicity, referring to the human being. Heidegger shows the temporality of human beings quite poignantly. The Dasein (human being) does not simply move through time. Its existence and identity are made up of what Heidegger calls the *stretching-along* (*Sicherstrecken*), namely an inner process of change that binds all moments of life: "Accordingly it is within the horizon of Dasein's temporal constitution that we must approach the ontological clarification of the connectedness of life-that is to say, the stretching-along, the movement, and the persistence which are specific for Dasein. The movement [Bewegtheit] of existence is not the motion [Bewegung] of something present-at-hand. It is definable in terms of the way Dasein stretches along. The specific movement in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along, we call its historizing" (Heidegger, 2008, p. 427). Human beings have a specific attitude rising out of this temporality: an awareness of being born in a world it does not control (*Geworfenheit*), being constituted by the past and tradition, and projecting oneself toward the future.

Non-human living beings do not have the same awareness or the possibility to choose through articulate rationality. The term "history" must be used in their case only qualifiedly, as Gadamer warns. Gadamer distinguishes between the history of the universe, as it is reconstructed by physics and evolutionary biology, and world history, the object of human sciences. While he agrees to use the term "history" for the development of the universe and the evolution of life on earth, he reserves the term "historicity" for human history:

The thematic distinction I make between 'history' and 'historicity' should already suggest to those who have an ear for it that I believe I detect a dangerous equivocation here. The word 'historicity' means something different from what the science of the history of the universe, understood in such an encompassing manner, takes as its object. (Gadamer, 2019, p. 26)

Yet, Gadamer might be too prudent here and perhaps out of character, given his constant connection between history and the definition of life. Living beings do have, Haig argues, an individual development and an evolutionary history whose uniqueness resembles, in a certain manner, human historicity. "Each species, each gene, is an individual with a deep evolutionary history. Each organism is an individual with a unique developmental history" (Haig, 2020, p. 362). Haig calls in his defense Gadamer's description of the temporal dynamics of tradition, which combines the preservation of the past with the creation of novelty. Like living beings, tradition must, in order to survive, reaffirm its existing elements and build new ones on their basis:

"Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. /.../ Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value (Gadamer, 2003, p. 281).

Haig detects a similar movement in natural selection, which trades old and new for the best possible biological outcome (2020, p. 278). Natural selection entails positive and negative selection. Positive selection replaces old, less-adapted gene sequences with new, more adapted sequences. Negative selection eliminates new less-adapted sequences and preserves old more-adapted ones. Positive and negative selection are often intertwined and rely on genetic differences that make a difference, a notion we will present in the next section. Furthermore, in natural selection, organisms and genes have a specific comportment toward past and future, even though they lack the sophisticated existential awareness and projection of Heidegger's Dasein. First, successful genes accumulate information about what has worked in the past. Survival and reproduction raise the bar for the persistence of a gene. Second, organisms constantly re-design themselves to face future adaptive challenges:

From the myriad potential causes in its world, an organism selects those causes that are applicable for its needs to intervene adaptively at decision points. The organism is an "unmoved mover" moved by self-selected information in pursuit of intended ends. It determines which differences will make a difference. The regress of responsibility stops here. Organisms pull their own strings. (Haig, 2020, p. 313)

To clarify the historical nature of living beings, Haig employs two hermeneutic notions: the hermeneutic circle and narrative. The hermeneutic circle represents the connection between parts and whole. To understand a text, one must understand its parts in view of the whole and the whole in terms of its parts. This kind of connection also yields in the case of living beings. In natural selection, the whole selects the parts. The survival outlook of organisms determines which genes are copied and recopied. The passage of ge-

netic information binds past and future, as genetic information is stored from the past, carried and modified toward the future:

Informational genes are the archival text of past performances that formed the text that informs. Material genes are actors in the play. Life is a cycle in which text and performance are reciprocally cause and effect of each other. The circle is rescued from eternal recurrence of the same by mutation (origin of difference) and selection (generation of meaning by the erasure of difference). The stage props that have withstood the tests of repeated use are tools that organisms use to interpret their world (Haig, 2020, p. 363).

The indissoluble relationship between an organism and its parts—genes, cells, and organs—indicates that living beings can only be understood as a connected unity, not a building-up of disconnected parts. Haig refers to Dilthey's distinction between explanation and understanding, showing that explanation rests on synthesizing parts, whereas understanding entails grasping a heterogeneous unity. Haig quotes a passage in which Dilthey differentiates between the knowledge of mental life, history, and society and the knowledge of nature:

We explain nature, but we understand mental life. Inner experience grasps the processes by which we accomplish something as well as the combination of individual functions of mental life as a whole. The experience of the whole context comes first; only later do we distinguish its individual parts. (Dilthey, in Haig, 2020, p. 361)

The heterogeneous unity of living historicity has a narrative structure made up of events and patterns of particular significance, as well as motivations and causes. Every kind of adaptation has its own story with several narrative lines. For instance, the essential oils in basil initially evolved in defense against insects. Survival against attackers was the primary purpose. Incidentally, the essential oils were pleasant to the human palate, and humans started to harvest basil. In the beginning, this harvesting ran against the persistence of basil because it impeded it to set seed. However, humans start-

ed cultivating seeds, improving basil's chances of survival. Basil acquired a new reason for existence: the appeal to the human palate. Basil's evolutionary story is structured thus by more than one line of functionality, and the passage from one function to another grants it coherence and significance (Haig, 2020, p. 275).

Given its embedding in the larger history of the environment, related living beings, and the species at large, the evolutionary narrative is not fully accessible but always open to discovering new remote causes. Haig notes that the narrative of one's person's birth contains a complex convergence of molecular events, which determines the location of chiasmata in the spermatocyte that bring about the haploid paternal progenitor. If the location would be only slightly different, the child conceived would be different. However, this chain of events is only a part of a larger causal ancestry that also contains the stories of grandparents and their survival. Therefore, there is no complete causal account: "...while all evolutionary processes are, in principle, reducible to physical causes, no feasible account can be causally complete. Every story needs a place to begin which leaves many things unsaid" (Haig, 2020, p. 234).

Despite its open structure, the narrative still has a unifying purpose. In the first part, we saw that organic self-movement would be merely repetitive without a purpose. The historicity of living beings worked out by Haig reinforces this idea. The stages of a living being's individual development or the phases of evolution and adaptation of a species are ordered through an incessant process of interpreting information that generates meaning. Evolutionary genetics reproduces, in the most elementary structures of organic beings, the hermeneutic dynamics that the German philosophy of life and history uncovered in human life.

#### 3.2 Interpretation and meaning

Through their self-movement, living beings pursue survival and flourishing in interaction with the environment. A flower turns toward the light source; an insect becomes green to camouflage against predators, and human beings avoid intercourse with closest

relatives to ensure genetic diversity for optimal reproduction. How do they do it? The secret to this evolutionary flexibility lies in their ability to elaborate information: information from past stages of an individual organism, past stages of a species' evolution, or, equally important, from the environment. Haig contends that living beings interpret information for the sake of a purpose. Thus, the information involved in the process of evolution is highly significant: Its interpretation gives rise to meaning.

Information and meaning are, for Haig, the equivalent of Aristotle's formal and final causes. The discovery of DNA revolutionized biology because it revealed what makes up the identity of living beings and their evolution. The information encoded in the DNA and the way this information is copied or modified are the key to understanding living beings. Haig starts from the distinction between material and informational genes. Material genes are the carriers of informational genes. A material gene is a group of atoms organized into a particular DNA sequence, which changes each time the double helix replicates, and the new gene is replaced by two new genes. The informational gene is the abstract sequence that persists through the replication of the double helix. This ability of the informational gene to persist through material changes and determine the nature of a living thing resembles Aristotle's formal cause:

The key development in the history of life was the origin of writing, of materials that were copied and had effects in the world that directly or indirectly influenced a copy's chance of being copied. These genetic materials do not create new matter from the void but rearrange existing matter to match a model. The successive copies are material things, not incorporeal ideas, but lineages of material genes preserve structure despite perpetual change in molecular substance. What is 'communicated' from model to copy? One may call it information or simply form. Genetic materials can be considered formal causes. Aristotle would have said that the formal cause of our being human is that which makes of our material cause a human being. Human, chimpanzee, and slug bodies are built of the same materials but have different

forms. Our bodies are more similar to the bodies of chimpanzees than to the bodies of slugs because we share more evolutionary history with chimpanzees than with slugs (one might say our formal causes are more similar). (Haig, 2020, p. xxiv)

Moreover, the formal causes of living beings are special because they do not only determine the structure of living beings. They also coordinate their self-movement – they animate the body. These special forms are souls. Haig shows that souls are the engines of organic action and ensure its unity:

The intricate mechanisms of living beings, what I have called souls, enable organisms to integrate sundry sensory inputs as choices of unified action. Souls are not easily analyzed: they are explicable and inexplicable in purely physical terms. Soul-structures are physicochemically arbitrary but operate within physical law. Soul-actions are physicochemically apposite because they make sense in a physical world. (Haig, 2020, p. 363)

The identification of genetic information with Aristotle's formal cause, particularly with the soul as a substantial form of living beings, is frequent in the work of contemporary scientists. The DNA code appeals, indeed, to those who take distance from the mechanistic paradigm and make efforts to uncover features of reality that are irreducible to a purely materialistic approach (Davies, 1999, p. 255; Davies, 2020, p. 24). For instance, John Polkinghorne argues that the soul is the information-bearing pattern that organizes the body and ensures its continuity despite the incessant replacement of atoms (2002, p. 105). If this organizing principle were mere material, it could not withstand the body's changes. Genetic information confirms, thus, Aristotle's insight. Yet, Aristotelians have difficulty accepting the equivalence of information and soul. While DNA is fundamental for a human being's identity, it does not fully capture the active quality of the substantial form, namely the soul (Kaiser, 2015). It seems that there must be an even deeper feature than DNA which animates the body and makes it be what it is,

namely a living body. I will not discuss this controversial issue in detail here. Regardless of the position one takes on the DNA/soul debate, the genetic code reinforces the idea that living beings are hermeneutic beings.

Besides, information per se and its transmission do not suffice to account for living beings. Not every information matters, but only the information interpreted for a purpose. Indeed, merely copying information would only bring about a repetitive being: "But copying alone does not get us anywhere: garbage in, garbage out. We want to feed garbage at one end and obtain something useful at the other end (an egg perhaps)" (Haig, 2020, p. xxiv). Recall that self-movement is more than a repetitive mechanism. To achieve organic self-fulfillment, it must process information for a purpose. Genetic replication helps Haig address a common objection to Aristotelian final causes that they violate the principle of causal antecedence. Causes should precede their effects, whereas final causes are at the end of a process. Survival and reproduction indicate one way to solve this dilemma. They guarantee the persistence of a gene and thus yield as final causes, yet they are the effects of a gene.

A gene's effects have a causal role in determining which genes are copied. A gene (considered as a lineage of material copies) persists if its lineage has been consistently associated with survival and reproduction. If possession of a gene is consistently associated with survival and reproduction then one can infer that a gene's *effects* have *causally* contributed to the gene's persistence. (Haig, 2020, p. xxv).

Thus, living beings select and interpret relevant information for survival, reproduction, and flourishing. The outcome of this interpretation is meaning. Meaning is interpreted information for the sake of an end. Haig gives abundant examples of such interpretations. For instance, gazelles use stotting to discourage hunting dogs, and beavers grow incisors to cut trees to build shelters from storms. Interpretation works even at the most elementary level, from DNA copying to the production of protein: "Cells contain three very important interpreters that evolved long ago

to interpret aperiodic polymers: DNA polymerases complement sense-strands of DNA with their antisense strand; RNA polymerases transcribe sense-strands of DNA as RNA; ribosomes translate messenger RNAs (mRNAs) as proteins" (Haig, 2020, p. 294). "Meaning" means, in this context, purpose. Living beings interpret information for a certain purpose: survival, reproduction, action, gene selection, and mutation. None of the fundamental organic processes can occur without interpretation. "Life is interpretation," claims Haig (2020, p. 347). Organic self-movement pursues meaning, an idea defended by Gadamer, too. Gadamer shows that meaning is not an ideal entity that floats above living processes but rather constitutes them and is part and parcel of their dynamics: "Life itself, flowing temporality, is ordered toward the formation of enduring units of significance. Life interprets itself. Life itself has a hermeneutic structure" (2003, p. 226). This hermeneutic structure is apparent only if seen within the self-movement of life. Otherwise, it can be rejected as an anthropomorphic projection on all living beings of an exclusively human trait.

Gary Tomlinson's criticism of Haig's Darwinian hermeneutics seems to miss the mark on this self-relationality of all living beings. Tomlinson accuses Haig and other authors who defend semantic universalism to illegitimately apply the notion of meaning to all biosphere levels. According to Tomlinson, only living beings on the upper evolutionary ladder create meaning. Tomlinson admits that information is ubiquitous in all living beings but denies that meaning is ubiquitous, too. Distinguishing between signals and signs, Tomlinson argues that many organic processes operate with signals and connections between signals without crossing into the realm of signs. In his view, signs entail a certain level of abstraction and metarelation absent in less sophisticated living beings. Tomlinson maintains the causal role of information but denies the semantic interpretation advocated by Haig:

Signals in this usage are a kind of information functioning to effect (reliably) Fodor's causal covariance in relation to border-levels of one kind or another. A sign, in contrast, is not a threshold phenomenon but

a linkage process — a multiple, metarelational kind of linkage, as we have seen. Signals need have none of the complex structure involved in any sign; in particular, no metarelations are required for them to function. They are inevitable parts of a lifeworld, but signs are not. (Tomlinson, 2023, p. 67)

Meaning depends on advanced capabilities like perception and cognition, which, unlike lower capabilities, grasp relations:

Meaning resides elsewhere, in short. It can supervene on evolution only through additional complexity arising from the nonteleological operation of selection, radical niche construction, and hypermediated information processing — specifically, from a folding over onto itself of the interaction of organism and niche that structures information as a particular kind of relation to a relation. (Tomlinson, 2023, p. 121)

The reader familiarized with the Aristotelian trope of self-movement will easily recognize it in Tomlinson's parlance: "folding over onto itself", "relation to a relation". It seems that Tomlinson restricts self-movement in its fullest to the advanced living beings endowed with perception and cognition. He acknowledges the spontaneity and complexity of all living beings, talking about "the open thermodynamic systems exemplified by all living beings" (2023, p. 48), the "intricate, looped networks of causal information" that "are a requirement for life" and "differentiate causal information within the biosphere from simpler causal information outside it" (2023, p. 262). Yet he only recognizes "reciprocal connectivity" (2023, p. 262) in neural systems involved in memory and learning.

If, however, we accept that all living beings are self-relational in the ways described in this paper, we can legitimately assert that they also interpret and pursue meaning, as this is a process necessary for producing the novelty involved in growth and self-fulfillment. Living beings cannot flourish without processing information toward a purpose and constantly projecting new meanings. Merely transmitting information would not fit the bill. To grow and adapt, organisms must select and process the relevant informa-

tion. For instance, protein creation at the cellular level needs specific information. In this sense, Paul Davies notes that the "quantity of information is the same whether a DNA sequence encodes instructions to build a protein or is just arbitrary 'junk' DNA" (2020, p. 65). What makes the difference is recognizing the instructions and responding to them appropriately. Davies shows the complex process a molecular milieu goes through once it identifies the relevant information:

Making proteins is a complicated affair, over and above the mRNA transcription step. Other proteins have to attach the right amino acids to strands of transfer RNA, which then bring them to the ribosome for their cargoes to be hooked together on cue. Once the chain of amino acids is completed, it may be modified by yet other proteins in many different ways./.../ (2020, p. 64)

Although non-rational organisms do not possess the cognitive capacity responsible for conceptualization and deductive reasoning, they can still select, process, and respond to information. They perform a biological interpretation<sup>4</sup> that pursues meaning by selecting significant information and acting upon it in a relevant manner. Instead of considering human reason as an exceptional addition to the organic realm, we should see it as the refinement of the organic ability to recognize, process, and respond to information.

The differences between various types of living beings (vegetal, animal, human) only amount to differences of degree in the complexity of interpretation and meaning. Haig distinguishes between complex and simpler interpreters and shows how genetic complexity increased during evolution:

From a beginning in the RNA world, an interpretative arms race unfolded among increasingly complex, heritable agents that strove to make sense of the previously uninterpretable. Agents that were informed by new inputs, or interpreted old inputs in new ways, could

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Tobias Keiling for suggesting the expression "biological interpretation."

exploit resources 'invisible' to less perceptive agents or avoid dangers to which the imperceptive succumbed. In the process, RNAs that at first instantiated both text (preservation of information) and performance (action in the world) were relegated to roles as messengers between DNA (as the archival record of past natural selection) and proteins (as effective actors). The complexity and precision of interpretation was facilitated by the evolution of high-fidelity interpreters of genetic texts: ribosomes for translation of mRNA into protein, RNA polymerases for transcription of DNA into mRNA, and DNA polymerases for copying the archival text. The replacement of RNAs by proteins marked a major expansion of the chemical lexicon from the four ribonucleotides of RNA to the twenty amino acids of proteins. (2020, p. 347)

Haig expresses the incessant process of meaning generation through Derrida's notion of difference. He refers to Derrida's comparison between living beings and writing in Of Grammatology (1976). For Derrida, meaning is fluid. Rather than transmitting a preexisting meaning, every interpretation generates new meaning and thus makes a new difference, in a restless accumulation of differences. Similarly, evolution selects the genes that make a difference in survival and reproduction. Each gene is an evolving text, having several versions ensuing through the addition or substraction of differences (Haig, 2020, p. 317). Consequently, there is no originary meaning, because the deconstruction of each gene is iterative, and each version comes about from a different one. What matters is the purpose, not the origin. Haig rejects the view that mutation is the source of meaning: "Mutation is nonmeaning. At the very beginning, in the origin of difference, is nonsense" (2020, p. 340). Living beings give rise to meaning by pursuing purposes and selecting genes that make a difference:

Natural selection is a poet who tries the mutations in search of a bon mot. Riboswitches, genes, and organisms are the poetry of life. They mean many things at once./.../The origin of meaning can be ascribed to natural selection sorting meaningful from meaningless mutations. Differential copying preserves variants of value and gives directedness

to the sequence of mutations in evolutionarily successful lineages. This is a process that separates gold from dross. (2020, p. 343)

This radical rejection of origin would be problematic to a Gadamerian. Gadamer would agree with Derrida that interpretation is not about a pre-existing meaning that each interpreter must identify. Indeed, if organic interpretation only operates with pre-existing meaning, there would be no generating of novelty. Yet, the hermeneutic circle entails, for Gadamer, a connection between old and new meaning. One never starts from scratch but from a meaning that is already there — in the individual expectations of the interpreter as well as the totality of significance to which a text belongs (Gadamer, 2003, p. 267). Furthermore, Gadamer would still be interested in asking about the origin, even beyond epoch-making events empirically provable:

We hear about the history of the universe that it began with the original explosion, the Big Bang, hence with a singular event. At this point, we, the feeble-minded scholars in human sciences, ask the obvious question: and what was there beforehand, prior to this singular event? (2019, p. 26)

According to Haig, the search for originary sense cannot be settled, at least not scientifically, because there is no definitive answer to the question of the chicken or the egg (2020, p. 319). But from Gadamer's perspective, a dialogue between natural and human sciences could not discount this question.

At the same time, Haig defends a robust relationship between biology and human sciences, which should be more than an opportunity for amicable exchanges and intellectual curiosity. Living beings are close to human sciences because of their heterogeneous unity, narrative structure, and interpretative nature. Physics and chemistry operate with pre-determined patterns and homogeneous entities and do not have the means to approach the historical complexity of living beings. Haig believes that biology must emulate human sciences to understand evolutionary processes whose structure is opaque to the methodology of natural sciences:

A biologist confronted by the behavior of a slug is in much the same position as a drama critic. The individual performance was shaped by evolutionary and developmental pasts, unknowable in detail and unmanipulable by the methods of experimental science. Knowledge from diverse sources must be brought to bear on problems of interpretation if one is to understand the meanings of a slug. (2020, p. 362)

#### 4. Conclusion

Haig's Darwinian hermeneutics shows that living beings and their evolution are not mere mechanisms operated by blind forces. On the contrary, living beings move themselves to fulfill their nature. Their individual development and collective evolution are historical and can be recounted in narrative terms. To survive, grow, and evolve, they interpret information for a purpose and pursue meaning. Thus, meaning is not just an afterthought or the obsession of those destabilized by what Daniel Dennett called "Darwin's dangerous idea" (1995). Like genetic information, meaning is embedded in every life. I showed that Haig articulated his view with the help of hermeneutics (especially Gadamer) and Aristotle. While hermeneutics moved from the bottom up, using Aristotle's biology to examine the dynamics of human life and history, Haig made the opposite move, applying the hermeneutic notions of history, interpretation, and meaning to all living beings. Despite the differences between organic kinds, I argued that this move is not illegitimate and anthropomorphic. Aristotle's idea of self-movement, combined with the contemporary knowledge of genetic information, natural selection, and mutation, supports Haig's claim that living beings are fundamentally meaningful<sup>5</sup>.

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# TERCERA SECCIÓN THIRD PART

### ÉTICA, POLÍTICA, FILOSOFÍA PRÁCTICA ETHICS, POLITICS, PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

#### CAPÍTULO VIII / CHAPTER VIII

#### SOBRE LA VIRTUD DE LA RESPONSABILIDAD: UNA TRAMA EPISTÉMICA A PARTIR DE LA HERMENÉUTICA\*

Luiz Rohden

#### **RESUMEN**

Este capítulo propone explorar la virtud epistémica de la responsabilidad basada en la hermenéutica filosófica de Hans-Georg Gadamer. Se argumenta que vivir responsablemente significa responder a los llamados de la vida de una manera que nos haga más plenos y contribuya a nutrir la trama de la existencia. La postura responsable implica escuchar al otro, acogerlo tal como es, ponerse en su lugar, dejarse afectar por él, reconocer sus razones y derechos, y estar dispuesto a cambiar nuestro modo de ver y vivir. La responsa-

<sup>\*</sup> Este capítulo fue escrito con el apoyo de la Bolsa PQ y del Proyecto PQG 09/23 -24/2551-0001524-8.

bilidad hermenéutica se ejerce hacia uno mismo, mediante el autoconocimiento y el cuidado de sí; hacia los demás, a través de la solidaridad y la práctica política transformadora; y hacia la naturaleza, reconociendo que somos parte de su tejido vital. En contraste con imperativos externos, la responsabilidad es vista como un componente intrínseco de nuestro modo humano de pensar y actuar que nos lleva a responder libre y conscientemente en las circunstancias singulares y contingentes de la vida.

**Palabras clave:** Responsabilidad, hermenéutica, Gadamer, ética, diálogo.

#### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter proposes to explore the epistemic virtue of responsibility based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. It argues that living responsibly means responding to life's calls in a way that makes us more complete and contributes to nurturing the fabric of existence. The responsible stance involves listening to the other, accepting them as they are, putting oneself in their place, allowing oneself to be affected by them, recognising their reasons and rights, and being willing to change our way of seeing and living. Hermeneutical responsibility is exercised towards oneself, through self-knowledge and self-care; towards others, through solidarity and transformative political practice; and towards nature, recognising that we are part of its vital fabric. In contrast to external imperatives, responsibility is seen as an intrinsic component of our human way of thinking and acting that leads us to respond freely and consciously in the singular and contingent circumstances of life.

**Keywords:** Responsibility, Hermeneutics, Gadamer, Ethics, Dialogue.

...vivimos, de modo incorregible, distraídos de las cosas más importantes. (Rosa, 1978a, p. 61)
Gadamer reconoce que nuestra responsabilidad de comprender siempre surge en circunstancias fácticas que son, por tanto, tan únicas como fluidas. En virtud de esto, nuestros esfuerzos para ser responsables siempre nos exigen discrepar con respecto a cualquiera orientación que hayamos tomado en ocasiones anteriores.

(George, 2014, p. 104)

## 1. Introducción o ¡filosofar como forma de responder a las llamadas de la vida!

Vivimos, no pocas veces, nuestro tiempo presente como si no hubiera no estuviera conformado ni por un mañana ni por un pasado; vivimos, a veces, como si fuéramos monadas desvinculadas incluso de nosotros mismos, de los otros, de la naturaleza; ¡Vivimos, frecuentemente, como si no fuéramos responsables de nosotros mismos, de aquellos a los que cautivamos o por los que hemos sido cautivados e incluso de aquella que nos engendró, Gaia!

En otras palabras, *filosofar* es intentar responder al enigma de estar vivos y comprendernos en el tejido de la vida en la que estamos enredados; es responder al llamado a dotar de sentido a nuestras vidas en el tiempo y el espacio en que nos ha tocado vivir; es responder al profundo anhelo de vivir felices, plenos, en esta misma vida con sus múltiples vidas; en definitiva, es responder a los innumerables llamados del viaje que la vida, desde que nacimos a bordo de ella, nos ha regalado.

El filósofo vive del placer de contemplar, de experimentar el bien total y se nutre del privilegio de tomar conciencia de su tiempo en el tiempo disponible para aprehender, en medio del remolino de la vida, qué es lo que realmente nos hace más libres y plenos. Y, como nos mostró Platón, el ejercicio contemplativo de la totalidad implica también un retorno a la caverna para desenterrar allí nuestra libertad y contribuir a liberar a los otros de sus ataduras.

En el contexto de mi investigación he desarrollado algunas dimensiones de la virtud de la responsabilidad encarnada en el imperativo del cuidado de sí y de los otros.

Cuidar de nuestra alma, de nuestro cuerpo, significa responsabilizarnos de nosotros mismos (Rohden & Kussler, 2017; Rohden, 2020; Rohden, 2022); comprender e interiorizar una posición de empatía y acogida del derecho y las razones de los otros, solidariamente (Rohden, 2021; Rohden & Kussler, 2021), implica vivir responsablemente.

Me propongo traer este tópico RESPONSABILIDAD al primer plano de las discusiones para fundamentarlo y justificarlo en cuanto virtud intrínseca a la teoría y práctica de la hermenéutica filosófica.

Parto del supuesto de que la hermenéutica contiene varios rasgos y exigencias que configuran la responsabilidad epistémica con uno mismo, con el otro, con la naturaleza—tal como justificaré a continuación.

## 2. Componentes epistemológicos de la virtud de la responsabilidad

En cuanto seres racionales, no actuamos sólo por impulsos y emociones, sino también por principios, razones y argumentos.

Nuestra aspiración a una vida feliz se construye sobre dimensiones objetivas, por eso podemos ponderarlas, reflexionar y responder frente ellas. Dado que formamos parte de un todo que nos precede, nos engloba y nos nutre, participamos, consciente e inconscientemente, en la vida de otros seres y, por ello, es imprescindible que les respondamos para vivir en un modo más apropiado y salvar nuestro planeta.

Para mi propósito de plasmar el concepto de virtud de la responsabilidad epistémica basado en la Hermenéutica, es importante tener en cuenta aquello que han desarrollado teóricos como Lorraine, a saber, el concepto de 'responsabilidad' puede permitir poner énfasis sobre la naturaleza activa de los conocedores/creyentes (...) un conocedor/creyente tiene un grado importante de elección con relación a los modos de estructuración cognitiva y es responsable de tales elecciones (...) Una persona puede ser considerada responsable o irresponsable solo si se considera claramente un agente (...) sean las que sean las circunstancias en cuestión. Una evaluación de la búsqueda del conocimiento humano en términos de responsabilidad es instructiva precisamente debido a la naturaleza activa y creativa de un tal esfuerzo. (Code, 2020, p. 86)

El término responsabilidad encierra la paradójica conclusión de que necesariamente se nos puede considerar responsables o irresponsables por nuestro modo de leer la realidad.

En consecuencia, tratar de conocer la realidad tal como es indica un componente epistemológico de la virtud de la responsabilidad, ya que de ello depende que se responda a ella de manera más o menos justa y adecuada. Por eso podemos pensar que la responsabilidad es una virtud intelectual.

De allí que las personas responsables, a la luz de la afirmación de Lorraine, son "personas intelectualmente virtuosas" porque

valoran saber y comprender cómo son las cosas realmente. Ellas resisten la tentación de vivir con explicaciones parciales donde otras más completas son alcanzables; resisten la tentación de vivir en la fantasía o en un mundo de sueños o ilusiones, considerando mejor saber, a pesar del tentador confort y complacencia que una vida de fantasía o ilusión (o una vida ampliamente teñida de una u otra) puede ofrecer. (Code, 2020, p. 94)

¡Configura irresponsabilidad—susceptible, pues, de penalización—que alguien sostenga el negacionismo científico y ecológico! ¿Cuántas vidas, cuántos planes y proyectos personales, cuántos planeamientos estratégicos zozobran simplemente por la irresponsabilidad de sus involucrados en no atenerse—por razones psicológicas, intelectuales o de intereses creados—a la realidad, a

los hechos, a las situaciones, es decir, a lo que está, de hecho, en cuestión en cada caso!

En lo que sigue, me propongo explicitar una serie de componentes epistemológicos de la virtud de la responsabilidad que encuentro en la Hermenéutica de Gadamer.

## 3. La virtud epistémica de la responsabilidad a partir de la hermenéutica

... la concepción de comprensión filosófica de Hans-Georg Gadamer puede ayudarnos a entender el carácter de nuestra responsabilidad ética y, de hecho, el sentido de responsabilidad está ligado a la pluralidad de nuestras experiencias éticas, siempre singulares y contingentes.

(George, 2014, p. 103)

En el seno de la Hermenéutica de Gadamer encontramos un conjunto de componentes de la virtud de la responsabilidad.

Para comenzar, su punto de partida está signado por la filosofía de Aristóteles la cual, a su vez, se apoya en la pregunta socrática "¿cómo debe vivir el ser humano?" (DaVia, 2020, p. 2), es decir, ¿cómo debemos actuar a lo largo de la vida para vivir plena y felizmente? Responder a esa pregunta, de orden teórico-práctico, constituye, en verdad, nuestro vivir.

El hecho de que Gadamer haya configurado la hermenéutica filosófica bajo la égida de la *phrônesis* aristotélica apunta a la existencia de la virtud de la responsabilidad en los caminos de la filosofía práctica.

En términos de Carlo DaVia,

esta cuestión práctica surge cuando algo nos lleva a alejarnos de nuestros asuntos prácticos cotidianos y deliberar sobre lo que debemos hacer y por qué. Al intentar responder a esa pregunta, ejercitamos la razón práctica. (DaVia, 2020, p. 2)

La ética es tejida por la búsqueda de la respuesta apropiada a nuestro deseo de felicidad en el tiempo y en el espacio en que nos encontramos.

Otra cara importante de la virtud de la responsabilidad en Gadamer estriba en su embate contra la hegemonía y la absolutización de la ciencia moderna. El autor mostró cuánto la autoridad "de la ciencia y de los expertos significó un alivio de la responsabilidad" (Gadamer, 1983, p. 85) personal, social y política. Al detectar "la creciente importancia de la técnica para la formación de opinión y de juicio dentro de la sociedad humana", destacó cuánto esa "orientación científica del mundo", abandonó la búsqueda de respuestas para la "razón de la existencia" y, a su vez, cuánto "la independencia de la ciencia con respecto a la filosofía significa, al mismo tiempo, su falta de responsabilidad". (Gadamer, 1983, p. 96)

Dicho de otra manera, "a medida que nuestras relaciones, acciones y funciones son reorganizadas por estructuras científicas y técnicas, nuestra gestión calculadora desplaza nuestras responsabilidades mutuas a sistemas organizadores". (Moules, 2020, p. 7)

Gadamer, siempre atento al peligro de la autoalienación derivada de la creencia ciega en las ciencias, fundamentó una relación responsable para con ellas, visible en su proyecto de "vincular unitariamente la ciencia y el saber del ser humano, en relación a sí mismo, a fin de conseguir una nueva autocomprensión de la humanidad", pues la sumisión a los dictados de la ciencia nos hace dependientes de sus creaciones e irresponsables.

En este sentido, podemos decir que vivir responsablemente implica construir respuestas frente a la "exigencia Délfica conócete a ti mismo" que

significaba 'reconoce que eres un hombre, no un dios'. Ella vale también para el ser humano, en la 'época de la ciencia', pues sirve de advertencia frente a todas las ilusiones de dominación y de dominio. Únicamente el autoconocimiento puede salvar la libertad que está, no solo amenazada por los respectivos gobernantes sino también por la dominación y la dependencia que surge de todo aquello que creemos dominar. (Gadamer, 1983, p. 87)

No hacerse responsable de la búsqueda del porqué de una determinada práctica delegando tal responsabilidad en el poder de cualquier tipo de autoridad implica vivir sin autonomía y sin compromiso con otros y con nuestro planeta.

En los términos de Gadamer, la crisis ecológica en la que estamos enredados es consecuencia de la aplicación ciega e irresponsable de la racionalidad técnica: "si seguimos en el camino en el que nos encontramos actualmente, provocará, en un tiempo no muy lejano, la imposibilidad de la vida en este planeta". (1983, p. 54)

Como es posible observar, la tesitura gadameriana de la virtud de la responsabilidad concierne al ámbito personal, científico y planetario y es por este motivo que urge asumir nuestra responsabilidad para con nosotros mismos, los otros y la naturaleza.

A continuación, propongo explicitar y presentar lo que comentaristas como Theodore George, Dennis Schmidt y Gianni Vattimo entendieron como componentes esenciales de la virtud de la responsabilidad en el seno de la Hermenéutica de Gadamer.

## 3.1 Responsabilidad de nosotros mismos: realización de nuestra humanidad por medio del diálogo y el conocimiento y cuidado de sí

Theodore George desarrolló un pertinente concepto de responsabilidad en su artículo "The Responsibility to Understand" donde propuso

arrojar una nueva luz sobre la responsabilidad en juego en la comprensión—o, dicho de forma más simple, la responsabilidad de comprender—sobre el motivo del llamamiento de Gadamer para que nos 'elevemos a la humanidad' por medio de la 'aptitud' (*Fähigkeit*) para el diálogo. (George, 2014, p. 103)

Ser y vivir responsablemente significa devenir más humanos mediante la práctica del diálogo; actuar responsablemente consiste en actualizar nuestra vocación dialógica que nos torna más plenos. Gadamer fue enfático, siguiendo la senda socrático-platónica, con su tesis de que la plenitud humana se teje dialógicamente y

no con la voluntad de adquirir y emplear una habilidad técnica en la comunicación o reglas y rituales (...) él asocia nuestra humanidad con la apertura para colocarnos en un contexto mayor, en el cual nos reconocemos menos como sujetos o agentes que por la capacidad de responder frente al otro en la exterioridad del ser que da sentido al yo en primer lugar. (George, 2014, p. 103)

La responsabilidad de comprender, en Gadamer, implica dos aspectos:

- a) responder al llamado a volvernos cada vez más humanos como algo innegociable, irrenunciable y sin excepción, es decir, nos tornamos irresponsables si nos desviamos del camino de vivir plenamente;
- b) y "reconocer que nuestra responsabilidad de comprender siempre surge en circunstancias fácticas que son, por lo tanto, tan únicas como fluidas".

De ahí que "nuestros esfuerzos para ser responsables siempre nos exigen discrepar con respecto a cualquiera orientación que hayamos tomado en ocasiones anteriores" (George, 2014, p. 103). Por eso propongo que asociemos la virtud de la responsabilidad hermenéutica con la necesidad de conocernos y cuidarnos a nosotros mismos, pues estos ejercicios nos hacen crecer en Ser lo que somos y llegamos a ser.

Comprender no significa someterse al flujo del tiempo, sino asumir la responsabilidad de crear caminos, en medio de este torbellino, que nos tornen cada vez más plenos. Como en un juego, jugar responsablemente es hacerlo siguiendo sus reglas y al mismo tiempo con ellas atreverse a crear nuevas jugadas que la ocasión crea y la libertad presenta al jugador en cuestión; tan solo caminar en el campo de juego significa jugar irresponsablemente; conformarse con matar el tiempo y esperar a que el juego termine es una forma mediocre e irresponsable de jugar. En los términos de Theodore George

La comprensión y, con ella, la aptitud para dialogar, involucra también la radicalidad del movimiento incalculable de ese juego. Gadamer también reconoce que este sentido de libertad lleva el peso de una responsabilidad radical. Porque en nuestros esfuerzos por entender, lo que está en juego cada vez es nada menos cómo y quiénes somos. (2014, p. 116)

La responsabilidad hermenéutica no estriba ni se ocupa de establecer normas ni de aclarar y justificar principios éticos, pues, "al contrario, la responsabilidad de comprender se concreta en el desplazamiento de prejuicios que nos permite permanecer más abiertos a los desafíos éticos de las situaciones fácticas en que nos encontramos y de las cuestiones que en ellas se encuentran en juego." (McCaffrey, 2020, p. 3)

En una dirección similar, según Dennis Schmidt, "la cuestión de la relación de la filosofía con la vida responsable, tal vez se encuentre en el análisis de nuestra conciencia de la mortalidad y de cómo ésta es transformadora" (Schmidt, 2019, p. 122). Siguiendo los pasos de Heidegger, para Schmidt, es la conciencia de la muerte la que nos hace más sensibles y responsables, pues en la experiencia de la mortalidad, que nos es única, "nos encontramos con nosotros mismos, con lo que es más inalienablemente 'mío' y, por lo tanto, con lo que más me define como ser humano. En esta conciencia de la mortalidad, descubro aquello por lo que debo responder y ser responsable" (Schmidt, 2019, p. 122).

#### 3.2 Responsabilidad para con los otros como práctica de la solidaridad

Como hemos visto, la conciencia profunda de nuestra finitud nos mueve al conocimiento y cuidado de nosotros mismos y nos abre y moviliza al encuentro con el otro, a la práctica de la solidaridad.

En la estela de la argumentación de George, destaco aquí que la relación con el otro no solo concierne a otras personas sino también a los animales. Para George "nuestra responsabilidad exige una capacidad de desplazar nuestra tendencia antropocéntrica hacia 'otros' animales distintos de los humanos" (Moules, 2020, p. 5). La virtud de la responsabilidad está relacionada con la práctica de la solidaridad en la medida en que ambas presuponen un desplazamiento hacia el horizonte del otro para abrir un espacio en que éste pueda expresarse y ver reconocidos, alentados y garantizados, sus razones y derechos.

De acuerdo con George,

Gadamer concibió la solidaridad como otro tipo de disposición hacia la 'apertura interpretativa mutua que primero permite que un mundo compartido se haga visible y que, por lo tanto, primero nos posibilita entrar en deliberación, juicio y acción política'. La solidaridad se convierte así en una forma de permitir que las personas busquen soluciones políticas en un espacio pluralista compartido, sin tener que asumir acuerdo o conformidad ni al inicio ni al final de la deliberación. (McCaffrey, 2020, p. 3)

Como se ve, la dimensión de la responsabilidad hacia el otro reivindica la práctica de la solidaridad, que es una versión de la práctica política.

La responsabilidad como práctica política ha sido desarrollada por Gianni Vattimo, asunto sobre el que expondré a continuación.

## 3.3 Responsabilidad para con el otro como práctica política para la "transformación interpretativa del mundo"

Otra dimensión de la responsabilidad para con el otro puede observarse en la práctica política de partir de la premisa de implosionar los paradigmas teóricos con el fin de implementar una emancipación social basada en el 'conflicto revolucionario' de acuerdo al proyecto de Gianni Vattimo: "nuestra responsabilidad hermenéutica exige que participemos de una política emancipadora que desafíe las verdades consensuales" (George, 2020, p. 2).

Junto a la responsabilidad como ejercicio de cuidado de sí mismo y del otro en la versión de la solidaridad, Vattimo propone una pertinente y fructífera "concepción hermenéutica (radical) de la verdad como una alternativa a la visión de correspondencia" para la cual

la responsabilidad de la verdad interpretativa, aprehendida como verdad cuestionadora, desafía, reconfigura y, con ello, sirve para debilitar el dominio de los criterios incuestionables de validez, de las condiciones de posibilidad o de los paradigmas establecidos, que nos permiten acompañar pretensiones de verdades de hecho en primer lugar. (George, 2020, p. 7)

De acuerdo con Vattimo, "la responsabilidad de la verdad interpretativa tiene origen en la necesidad de redención, de libertad" (George, 2020, p. 8), y no se circunscribe en construir, irónicamente, "la búsqueda de un acuerdo", aun cuando lo persiga siempre, sino que procura "responder a las necesidades más profundas que lo mueven, y por eso debe estar orientado por el conflicto revolucionario, no por la reconciliación caritativa" (George, 2020, p. 9).

En otros términos, pues, "esa responsabilidad, entonces, se realiza por medio de un conflicto interpretativo que debilita los paradigmas establecidos de la ciencia normal y de la política normal" y que comprende "una promoción de relaciones humanas no violentas" (George, 2020, p. 9).

Vattimo detecta indicios de responsabilidad política también en Gadamer, pues la transformación que rompe y transfigura paradigmas acontece dialógicamente, o más específicamente aún, "escuchando al otro, a aquellos que fueron excluidos por determinados paradigmas" (George, 2020, p. 15) sociales, epistemológicos, políticos.

En definitiva,

La identificación de Vattimo de nuestra responsabilidad hermenéutica con la 'disolución ética de la realidad' se diferencia, en todo caso, por la radicalidad de su rechazo a la política del *establishment*. Considerando aquello que, al menos, parece ser una creciente insatisfacción global con el *status quo* político en la actualidad, es difícil no percibir el atractivo del enfoque de Vattimo. Él exige que nos involucremos en

el conflicto—ciertamente, conflicto interpretativo y no violento—contra la propia 'realidad' que nos condujo a nuestra insatisfacción. (George, 2020, p. 15)

## 4. ¿Qué es y qué significa ser y actuar de modo responsable?

Ahora propongo profundizar en el concepto de responsabilidad explicando qué es y qué significa actuar responsablemente.

En contraste con la fuerza de la obligación religiosa o del deber kantiano o de la justificación del sentido y significado de la virtud de la responsabilidad fundamentada en la *Heurística del Temor*—que se erigió ante el legado de la *Herencia de Muerte* bajo el prisma del medio ambiente de acuerdo con Hans Jonas—propongo justificar la virtud de la responsabilidad como un componente, por así decirlo, *natural*, es decir, propia de nuestro modo humano de pensar y de actuar.

En otras palabras, la responsabilidad no nos sobreviene como un orden o un deber racional externos, sino que nos conforma; ella no es ajena a nuestro ser y no necesitamos coacción externa, sentimental o económica para 'ejecutarla', sino que forma parte de nosotros y nos hace plenos. Su conocimiento y su cultivo hacen de nuestra existencia una existencia libre, feliz y plena con respecto a nosotros, los otros y la naturaleza.

A continuación, siguiendo las huellas de Theodore George, Dennis Schmidt y Gianni Vattimo, propongo explicitar algunas dimensiones prácticas y posturas partícipes de la virtud de la responsabilidad hermenéutica a partir de la tesis del *Yo Hermeneuticus* que defiendo (Rohden, 2022). Parto del presupuesto de que necesitamos reelaborar nuestro modo de pensar, de percibir, de reaccionar, de oír y de mirar el mundo, ya que, después de todo, en palabras de Pessoa:

Desde mi aldea veo cuánto de la tierra se puede ver en el Universo... Por eso mi aldea es tan grande como cualquier otra tierra Porque soy del tamaño de lo que veo Y no del tamaño de mí estatura. (Pessoa, 1994, p. 208) En primer lugar, ser responsable significa escuchar al otro atendiendo a sus deseos, deberes y expectativas; ser capaz de auscultar lo que esa persona tiene o está tratando de decirnos, independientemente de nuestros juicios y de los jueces. Ser responsable es hacer el esfuerzo de ser todo oídos a las expresiones del otro; aunque sea difícil, y a veces, imposible, lo que importa es hacer el esfuerzo fáctico de oír al otro mediante una *epoché* (una suspensión provisional del juicio) posibilitando el sintonizarnos con su *vibe*. La plenitud humana se teje por esta composición básica de la virtud de la responsabilidad en los términos de Gadamer que "asocia nuestra humanidad con la apertura para colocarnos en un contexto mayor, en el cual nos reconocemos menos como sujetos o agentes que por la capacidad de responder frente al otro" (George, 2014, p. 103).

En segundo lugar, el arte de auscultar al otro incluye al ser responsable, lo que significa acoger al otro y a la vida tal como son. Arte difícil porque tendemos, en general, a imponer al otro nuestra forma de ver, sentir y percibir. Forma parte de la actitud responsable el acoger al otro, lo que exige dejarlo aparecer, manifestarse, ser tal como es o pretende ser. Ser responsable significa posibilitar que el otro se sienta cómodo y seguro de poder expresarse como se ve o vive y desde ese lugar hablar y actuar, después de todo, "la vida no perdona los descuidos" (Rosa, 1978b, p. 218). Más que deber racional o caridad, el concepto de responsabilidad comporta, racional y argumentativamente, una postura de atención con relación al otro.

En tercer lugar, ser responsable significa ponerse, como se suele decir, en *los zapatos de los otros*. El verbo *Verstehen*—estar junto a, ponerse al lado de—contiene esa faz de la responsabilidad en la medida en que presupone y exige que aquel que comprende procure colocarse en el lugar del otro, imaginarse en la posición del otro, percibirse en el mundo del otro e incluso sentirse en el horizonte del otro; y el grado de efectividad de esto depende de factores de orden personal, religioso, cultural y político. Ser responsable significa hacer el esfuerzo por cruzar desde nuestra orilla hacia la del otro y así,

de hecho, disponerse a crear la tercera orilla que compone la belleza de la tercera vía de la vida (Rohden, en prensa).

En cuarto lugar, ser responsable significa dejarse afectar por el otro; significa sensibilizarse con sus sentimientos y sueños. Una respuesta apropiada y justa para con el otro presupone que la palabra del otro resuene en nuestras mentes y reverbere en nuestras almas. Una actitud engreída hacia el otro, por el contrario, pavimenta una postura irresponsable porque desprecia e impide que el habla y los deseos de los demás sean acogidos y reconocidos.

En quinto lugar, responder a la altura del otro significa practicar el arte de no solo conceder o reconocer derechos a sus derechos y razones (Rohden, 2021), sino, mejor aún, admitir que el punto de vista y los argumentos del otro pueden ser mejores que los míos. Ser responsable significa, pues, tener conocimiento de esa posibilidad y estar dispuesto a dar la razón. Esta postura de reconocimiento implosiona toda forma de negacionismo.

En sexto lugar, un despliegue posible, radical, de la postura responsable consiste en cambiar un estilo de ver, percibir y vivir la vida en su plenitud. Ese cambio responsable constituye un ejercicio interminable y, más que una parte móvil de la existencia instituye su sentido y su razón de ser. Desapegados tanto del punto de partida como del de llegada, ser responsable significa vivir justamente el placer de moverse. A fin de cuentas, la felicidad y la plenitud humana no son estados estáticos, sino modos de ser, tal como testimonia Riobaldo al final del *Gran Sertón: Sendas:* "Existe un hombre humano. Travesía."

En séptimo lugar, vivir responsablemente significa esforzarse por comprendernos a nosotros mismos, a los otros y a la naturaleza, pues nuestra forma de actuar se sigue de la forma en que comprendemos. Es del modo de mirar que se sigue nuestro caminar. Es con respecto a la forma en que sentimos que ajustamos nuestro pensar. Responder responsablemente a la vida implica auscultar, en cada caso y con cada persona, lo que sucede para instaurar *la cosa correcta*, aquello que el bien ha de significar, lo que genera más vida y felicidad en cada ocasión, "porque ninguna teoría o regla puede llevarnos

allí—en cambio, requiere una 'apertura, sintonía, imaginación y determinación' que surgen nuevamente en todas las situaciones" (Moules, 2020, p. 2). Ser responsable es responder a nuestra constitución de seres dotados de razón y emoción para mirar, discernir, decidir y efectuar la mejor elección sobre lo que, de hecho, en cada ocasión, nos hace felices; significa ejercer nuestra autonomía ante la vida y así responder por nuestra forma de pensar y de actuar, con sus costos y beneficios; significa cuidar de la madre naturaleza que nos engendró, pues, después de todo, nuestra vida se alimenta de sus nutrientes, sales, minerales, vegetales. Somos parte de la trama de la vida y por eso necesitamos responderle sin romper sus hilos alimentando el ciclo virtuoso y no vicioso del vivir.

#### 5. Conclusiones

Propuse una tesitura, un tejido, y pertinencia de la virtud epistémica de la responsabilidad a partir de los hilos del *Yo Hermeneuticus*. Sugerí que nuestra práctica de una vida sana y sostenible no se orienta por la aplicación de reglas o de imperativos *tout court*; tampoco se sostiene en el temor, el deber o la culpa. Sostuve también que la virtud de la responsabilidad consiste en aprender a responder, a dar respuesta, libre y conscientemente, en la singularidad y en las contingencias, algo que nos torna más plenos, nos conviene, y contribuye a nutrir la urdimbre de la vida, pues, en la vida cotidiana "...vivimos, de modo incorregible, distraídos de las cosas más importantes" (Rosa, 1978a, p. 61).

La virtud de la responsabilidad nos hace aunar responsablemente nuestro pasado con nuestros proyectos futuros en el tiempo presente; nos motiva a aprehender, en cada instante de la vida, aquello que vale la pena ser hecho y vivido, aquello que da sabor y placer de vivir. Después de todo, en la senda de Pessoa, "De la verdad no quiero más que la vida; que los dioses dan vida y no verdad, tal vez ni sepan cuál es la verdad" (Pessoa, 1994, p. 296).

Responder responsablemente significa retribuir vida con la vida que recibimos y en la cual estamos enredados; significa reunirnos y reconectarnos con la trama de la vida que nos engendró y

nos mantiene ya que, a fin de cuentas, "vivir es respirar; detenerse ya es morir" (Rosa, 1978c, p. 25); es decir, vivir es responder a sus llamados y deberes. En fin, vivir responsablemente significa cuidar de quien nos engendraron y crearon; significa disfrutar a quien cautivamos y nos cautivó; implica cultivar y proteger las vidas que nos han sido confiadas para cuidar.

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## CAPÍTULO IX / CHAPTER IX

# GADAMER'S CONCEPTION OF PHRONESIS AND THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY

Darren Walhof

### **RESUMEN**

Este capítulo aborda la cuestión de cómo la concepción de *phronesis* (sabiduría práctica) de Hans-Georg Gadamer podría servir como un posible antídoto contra la desinformación y las teorías conspirativas que amenazan la democracia en la actualidad. En lo que sigue, examino esta cuestión: primero, recurriendo a la literatura de investigación sobre desinformación y teorías conspirativas para obtener perspectivas sobre cómo y por qué ocurren estos fenómenos; segundo, examinando el resurgimiento que hace Gadamer de la tradición platónico-aristotélica de la sabiduría práctica a mediados del siglo XX; y finalmente, extendiendo y revisando esta tradición para enfrentar los desafíos de la democracia actual. Basándome en el trabajo de Gadamer, sostengo que enfrentar el desafío de la desinformación y las teorías conspirativas requiere, en-

tre otras cosas, fomentar la *phronesis* como una capacidad cívica de realizar juicios contextualizados sobre fines y medios. La sabiduría práctica así conceptualizada equipa a los ciudadanos para sentirse cómodos en situaciones de incertidumbre y complejidad y así resistir el alarmismo, las narrativas melodramáticas y las presiones reputacionales, fortaleciendo de este modo su inmunidad ante el atractivo de las teorías conspirativas.

Palabras clave: *Phronesis*, Gadamer, Teorías conspirativas, Desinformación, Democracia, Educación cívica.

#### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter takes up the question of how Hans-Georg Gadamer's conception of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) might serve as a possible antidote to the misinformation and conspiracy theories that threaten democracy today. I examine this question by: first, turning to the research literature on misinformation and conspiracy theories to gain insights on how and why these phenomena occur; second, examining Gadamer's revival of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition of practical wisdom in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; and finally, extending and revising this tradition to meet the challenges of democracy today. Drawing on Gadamer's work, I argue that meeting the challenge of misinformation and conspiracy theories requires, among other things, fostering phronesis as a civic capacity of making contextualized judgments about ends and means. Practical wisdom so conceptualized equips citizens to be comfortable in situations of uncertainty and complexity and so to resist fear-mongering, melodramatic narratives, and reputational pressures, thereby bolstering their immunity to the appeal of conspiracy theories.

**Keywords:** *Phronesis*, Gadamer, Conspiracy theories, Misinformation, Democracy, Civic Education.

#### 1. Introduction

Among the threats to democracy today is the use of misinformation by anti-democratic elites as a means of securing and retaining power. These tactics depend upon a significant portion of the citizenry accepting and spreading this misinformation. This is not a new challenge; indeed, as far back as *The Republic*, Plato warns of the potential for democracies to devolve into tyrannies through demagogues' use of flattery, fear, and lies (*Rep.* 562a–569c). However, new communication technologies combined with significant polarization have helped manifest this old threat in new and especially challenging ways. This chapter turns to Hans-Georg Gadamer's revival of *phronesis* as a potential resource against the threat of misinformation, especially as seen in the spread of conspiracy theories.

I argue that meeting the challenge of misinformation and conspiracy theories requires, among other things, fostering *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as a civic capacity of making contextualized judgments about ends and means. Practical wisdom so conceptualized equips citizens to be comfortable in situations of uncertainty and complexity and so to resist fear-mongering, melodramatic narratives, and reputational pressures, thereby bolstering their immunity to the appeal of conspiracy theories. I make this case by: first, turning to the literature on conspiracy theories to gain insights on how and why they spread; second, examining the twentieth-century revival of the Aristotelian tradition of practical wisdom by Hans Georg Gadamer, particularly in his later writings; and finally, extending and revising this tradition to meet the new challenges of conspiracy theories and misinformation today.

## 2. Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories

The rapid acceptance and spread of misinformation threatens democracy by, among other things, eroding trust in public institutions and electoral processes, enhancing prejudices against vulnerable groups, and legitimizing violence. Reducing this threat can target either the supply of misinformation, the demand for it, or some combination of the two. Efforts to restrict supply run into difficult epistemological questions, thorny free speech issues, and also usually depend on further empowering already powerful institutions (government bureaucracies, law enforcement, or social media corporations, for example). This chapter focuses instead on the demand side. Given the recent increase in the spread and adoption of misinformation, especially during the first years of the Covid epidemic, why is this the case? What factors contribute toward some being susceptible to believing and spreading misinformation?

Growing literatures in political science and psychology seek to answer these questions, using conspiracy theories as a proxy for misinformation. There are disagreements about how precisely to define conspiracy theories, but generally they are taken to be explanations of social and political phenomena that (1) are framed in Manichean terms, (2) disregard conventional explanations as a ruse or distraction, and (3) instead locate causes in unseen and intentional forces (Oliver and Wood, 2014, p. 953). Carrying out empirical research on conspiracy beliefs is complex and costly, and there are often multiple confounding factors, so the results in the literature are mixed and sometimes contradictory. Nonetheless, we can glean important insights from the research in order to theorize antidotes that may help address the demand for misinformation.

The factors explaining the lure of conspiracy theories can generally be grouped into three sets of factors: (1) broad economic, social, and cultural trends; (2) psychological and personality traits; and (3) political opportunities. The first set has been of interest to philosophers and cultural and political theorists for decades, especially in mid- and late-twentieth century analyses of the consequences of modernity. In a complex, modern society, outcomes are often the result of large numbers of interacting agents and rarely correspond to the intentions of any of them directly. In the face of largely anonymous social and economic changes, the idea of some group or organization actually controlling events is a way that some citizens cope with a pervasive and generalized sense of powerlessness (Moore, 2016, pp. 6–8). This sense of powerlessness

is particularly keen during eras of low trust (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart, 2016, p. 825). Given that we lack direct information and evidence for most of what we know and believe, the absence of trust in societal institutions and processes provides fertile ground for conspiracy theories as explanations for complex social and political phenomena (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009, p. 211).

Of course, not all those in the same social, economic, and cultural settings latch on to conspiracy theories to the same extent or with the same fervor. Researchers look to the second set of factors, psychological and personality traits, to try to understand why some are drawn to conspiratorial explanations while others are not. Oliver and Wood argue that two psychological predispositions contribute to what they call a "conspiratorial view" of politics: a propensity toward melodramatic narratives and a propensity toward attributing causality to unseen forces (Oliver and Wood, 2014, p. 954). Similarly, Uscinski and Parent argue that socialization in a person's formative years helps explain what makes some more prone to adopt conspiracy theories than others. Early socialization, they claim, contributes toward a conspiratorial worldview, marked by a tendency to see the world as a place dominated by secret, malevolent actions. This worldview is correlated with greater acceptance of violence, less political involvement, lower educational achievement, and lower household income (Uscinski and Parent, 2014), although more recent research has questioned the correlation with lower income (Klofstad, 2020). While some researchers have found belief in conspiracy theories to be unrelated to partisanship or political ideology (Oliver and Wood, 2014), others have more recently found a correlation with rightwing, populist ideologies (Schaeffer, 2020; van Prooijen, 2018). Additional research has found correlations between endorsement of conspiracy theories and antisocial personality and psychological traits such as narcissism and psychopathy (Uscinski et al., 2022).

Researchers have also approached conspiracy theory endorsement as an instance of motivated reasoning. Those predisposed toward seeing secret, malevolent forces adopt and spread cons-

piracy theories because doing so protects this worldview and demonstrates its potency (Miller, Saunders, and Farhart, 2016, p. 825). These researchers find differences based on political ideology in the United States. For conservatives, *high* levels of knowledge about politics and *low* levels of trust correlate with conspiracy theory endorsement, while for liberals, political knowledge and trust are *both* negatively correlated with endorsement (2016, p. 837). Given that their research was conducted during the Obama presidency, this may be an effect identified elsewhere in the literature: that alterations in power cause different conspiracy theories to resonate at different times. That is, having one's party out of power heightens the feelings of anxiety and loss of control that help spur attachment to conspiracy theories (Uscinski and Parent 2014, p. 20).

The issue of who holds political power is related to the third set of factors affecting the appeal of conspiracy theories, political opportunities. Conspiracy theories can spread organically, especially via social media, but their distribution is also aided by what have been called conspiracy entrepreneurs (Sunstein and Vermeule, 2009, p. 212). These individuals and their organizations often benefit directly from the spread of conspiracy theories through increased fame, wealth, or political influence, and thus are highly motivated to sell others on these beliefs, even if they may not personally believe them. Those theories involving the biggest groups, enemies, and gains tend to have the most adherents (Uscinski and Parent, 2014, p. 18). Political polarization offers additional opportunity for the spread of conspiracy theories, since endorsement of one or more theories helps bolster a collective identity often construed as under threat (Miller and Saunders, 2016, p. 129). The self-sorting that has accompanied polarization in the United States and elsewhere also supports the spread of conspiracy theories, as reputational pressures and reinforcing emotions push in the direction of endorsement. While political ideology may not be necessarily correlated with a general tendency to endorse conspiracy theories, a correlation with the extremity of one's political attachments has been found (van Prooijen, Krouwel, and Pollet, 2015, p. 575). Not surprisingly, conspiratorial thinking is magnified by social media use, although the relationship is complex (Enders et al., 2023).

These sets of factors – social and cultural, psychological, and political – interact in complex fashion, and not necessarily in the same ways with respect to particular theories or groups. To what extent do similar factors underlie the spread of claims that, say, the attack on 9/11 was planned and coordinated by the U.S. government, President Obama is not a U.S. citizen, President Trump is a Russian asset, and President Biden's election in 2020 was fraudulent? It is not entirely clear, but the research collectively suggests that we should not be surprised that conspiracy theories of all sorts are flourishing in the U.S. and some other democracies right now. A baseline sense of power-lessness and anxiety in the face of globalized economic changes, growing inequality, technological developments, natural disasters, and political upheaval provides fertile ground for conspiracy entrepreneurs to spread Manichean tales of dark, unseen forces at work. Political polarization and heightened mistrust help such tales take hold amongst extreme ideologues, and some of these tales spiral into broader endorsement by more moderate groups through reputational pressures and in-group and out-group signaling.

## 3. The Hermeneutic Recovery of Phronesis

In order for democratic citizens to resist getting caught up in the spread of conspiracy theories, they must be able to make political judgments in situations marked by uncertainty and complexity, and they must withstand the temptations posed by melodramatic narratives, fear-mongering, and reputational pressures. These civic capacities are part of what Aristotle theorized as *phronesis*.

Aristotle takes up *phronesis* systematically in Book VI of the Nicomachean Ethics in his discussion of the use of right reason (*orthos logos*) to achieve the mean between excess and deficiency. As he is wont to do, Aristotle starts his discussion of practical wisdom with

everyday empiricism: What qualities are possessed by those we regard as practically wise? In other words, why do we call them this? His answer is that we assign this label to those who excel at deliberating about both what is good *and* what is expedient in situations where there are not clear rules to follow. Practical wisdom is the ability to make good choices in situations of uncertainty and possibility, when things "can be otherwise than they are" (EN VI.5). Aristotle points out that, unlike the intellectual virtues of knowledge and art, the deployment of practical wisdom involves both assessing and taking action, which is why it is considered to be the virtue of political leaders. This is what we respect in Pericles and other leaders like him, Aristotle says: they see not only what the pursuit of the good demands in a particular situation, but also how to accomplish it. They are skilled decision-makers and skilled managers, of both households and political communities, corrupted by neither pleasure nor pain, but committed to the pursuit of the good (EN VI.5).

The twentieth century witnessed a retrieval of Aristotelian thinking in a variety of disciplines, including moral philosophy, social and political theory, philosophy of science, and theology (Hollinger, 1985, p. 113). More than other strands of thought, philosophical hermeneutics, as inaugurated by Martin Heidegger and brought to fruition by Hans-Georg Gadamer, saw itself as heir to Aristotelian practical philosophy (Gadamer, 1979, p. 107). Gadamer and his interlocutors and disciples substantially recovered and reconceptualized *phronesis*, placing it at the center of their efforts to address the social and political challenges of the middle and late twentieth century. In the context of the challenge to democracy of widespread misinformation and conspiracy theories, his retrieval of *phronesis* offers a rich starting point for our thinking about practical wisdom and democracy.

In general terms, Gadamer's project of philosophical hermeneutics aims at providing a phenomenological account of what happens when we come to an understanding about something, whether in reading a text, viewing a work of art, engaging in con-

versation, watching a play, or some other encounter. His project was substantially motivated by a worry that only the methods of the natural sciences were seen as producing true knowledge. As a result, his major works, especially his 1960 magnus opus *Truth and Method*, frequently compare the natural sciences to the human sciences in order to defend the latter as disclosive of truth and knowledge. The goal in the natural and technical sciences is to develop theoretical knowledge that can in turn be deployed in the form of technology. For Gadamer, technical knowledge — what he calls *techne* — is thus marked by two features: (1) it depends on methodologies that enable distancing from the messiness of reality, and (2) its purposes of mastery and control are inherent and thus given. According to Gadamer, the relationship between general principle and particular outcome in technical knowledge is a relationship of application (Gadamer, 1995, p. 312).

In the human sciences, Gadamer argues, the relationship between general and particular works instead as concretization, something exemplified most clearly in law. The judgment of a lawyer or judge bridges the gap between the generality of statutory law and its meaning in a particular situation. This moment of making the law concrete always has an interpretive dimension, which means that the text of the law "must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way" (Gadamer, 1995, p. 309). Similarly, when it comes to the kind of knowledge at issue in the human sciences, as he says a few pages later, understanding is always a "special case of applying something universal to a particular situation" (Gadamer, 1995, p. 312). The concretization that takes place, Gadamer contends, depends upon phronesis, which involves a simultaneous judgment about both ends and means. The right purposes cannot be known in advance of a given situation, as they can in matters involving scientific and technical knowledge (Gadamer, 1995, p. 321). Instead, one must in the moment determine both the right goal and the right means to that goal.

In interpreting *phronesis* as a moment of concretization, Gadamer aligns himself with a one side in an interpretive debate over

the nature of *phronesis* in Aristotle's thought, even though he does not acknowledge this directly. The divide is over whether phronesis involves choosing the means only to pregiven ends or involves choosing both ends and means. Those in the "means only" camp rely on passages in Aristotle that assert that character virtue, rather than phronesis or one of the other intellectual virtues, determines the goal. The consideration and judging of means in the exercise of practical wisdom, these scholars argue, must be secured by something, and that something is a correct moral character. Aiming at the right goal depends on having the right character (Moss, 2014, pp. 156-157). Those who exercise practical wisdom in politics, on this reading, do not choose which good to pursue but only the policies and actions that obtain the highest good for humans, eudaimonia. Aristotle illustrates this with an analogy from medicine: for doctors, the goal of health for their patients is a given, and their task is to help select the means towards good health. Clearly, someone who employs medical expertise to pursue goals other than the health of patients is unfit to be a doctor; likewise, those who pursue something other than eudaimonia are unfit to be political leaders (Aristotle, 1962, I.4; Moss, 2014, p. 186). Only those habituated toward the good can exercise practical wisdom in politics.

At times, Gadamer seems to support this "means-only" reading of phronesis, especially in his 1978 book, The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy. His investigation of practical wisdom here focuses primarily on Plato rather than Aristotle, who is largely absent until the penultimate chapter. Against interpretations that set Aristotle's empiricism and contextualism in contrast to Plato's idealism, Gadamer instead emphasizes the continuity between the two thinkers, treating them as trying to work out the same questions about the good, albeit in different contexts and through different genres (Gadamer, 1986, pp. 1–4). Gadamer reads the Republic's allegory of the cave not as an epistemological problem of knowledge and application but as a demonstration that dedication to the good can be reconciled with the practical demands of society and politics (Gadamer, 1986, p. 78). He points to a double

blindness in the tale: first, when those accustomed to the dark initially leave the cave and are blinded by the sun and, second, when those who have seen the sun return to the darkness of the cave. Those who return stumble around blindly at first and are of no use to the cave-dwellers, and so it is understandable, Gadamer says, that the cave-dwellers ridicule and abuse them. As long as those who return to the cave remain unable to see clearly back in the cave, the fact that they have seen the sun is irrelevant. As Gadamer notes, "one must not only get used to the light; one must also get used to the dark" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 75).

In both cases this is possible. Those who escape the cave eventually adjust to the brightness outside the cave, and upon their return they eventually adjust back to the darkness. Over time, they can adapt to both places, but adaptation is required; it is not a mere problem of applying new knowledge. According to Gadamer, the allegory shows that those who left the cave and returned are superior to those who remained *not* because those who left have increased knowledge, but because they now have concern for the good. Those who never left the cave do not initially understand these concerns because they still know "how things tend to go in social and political life and what practices promise to be successful there" (Gadamer, 1986, p. 78). The cave-dwellers know how to navigate the cave, but those who left and returned now look to the good in their exercise of practical wisdom. Their escape from the cave has changed them by "turning the whole soul around," so that they now approach practical affairs differently than they used to (Gadamer, 1986, p. 83).

This Plato-inflected reading of *phronesis*, in which the pursuit of the good is a presumed goal because one's soul has been turned around, stands apart from Gadamer's other discussions of practical wisdom, which are more generally aligned with those who argue that *phronesis* for Aristotle involves choosing both ends and means. This camp concedes that for Aristotle the highest good is given and known by the virtuous as a matter of intuition rather than reasoning or deliberation and, in this sense, is not a matter of choice.

But, they contend, this intuitive sense of the highest good as our goal does not necessarily get us very far in any particular situation. What these scholars emphasize, instead, is that in a particular context one will have to choose more immediate ends that may themselves be means towards this higher good. In other words, what is an end in one context is a means in another (Cooper, 1986, p. 15). These more immediate ends are, according to this interpretation, matters of deliberation and choice, and being able to assess and choose the correct one in a particular context at a particular moment depends upon practical wisdom. In this way, then, *phronesis* involves choosing both means and ends.

Gadamer repeatedly sets phronesis in contrast to techne, a move that highlights the fact that the former includes choosing both ends and means. For example, in a 1970s essay on scientific expertise, Gadamer frets that the dominance of techne, which he characterizes as a form of technical rationality, undermines and threatens a more reflective mode of living in which one's choices involve the exercise of judgment both about what is good and what course of action will advance the good (Gadamer, 1981, p. 91). Rather than engage in this reflective choosing, we instead defer to experts with scientific and technical knowledge, hoping that such knowledge can simply be applied to social problems in order to solve them and bring society closer to some ideal (Gadamer, 1981, p. 73). But, Gadamer argues, scientific and technical knowledge are inadequate for solving social problems, since these problems always require contextualized judgments in concrete situations (Gadamer, 1981, p. 92). In other words, solving social and political problems requires practical wisdom, conceptualized as the ability to choose both ends and means appropriate to the situation at hand.

The way Gadamer draws the contrast between *phronesis* and *techne* in his later writings is a departure from Aristotle. For Aristotle, *techne* and *phronesis* are both pragmatic, contextualized forms of knowledge that stand in contrast to *episteme*, which is context-independent and universal. As art or craft, *techne* is the kind of knowhow found in practices of production, whereas *phronesis* has to do

with deliberation about action and includes judgments as to what is good and possible (Duvenage, 2015, p. 79). Gadamer tends to associate *episteme* solely with the mathematical sciences and instead shifts some of its traits to *techne*, which he links to the natural and technological sciences. In so doing, Gadamer identifies all contextualized knowledge with *phronesis*. He also views *phronesis* as the highest human excellence, ignoring the primacy Aristotle assigns to *sophia*, theoretical wisdom (Berti, 2000, pp. 347–350). Gadamer's elevation of *phronesis* opens up possibilities for rethinking practical wisdom today, although his ongoing concern about the dominance of *techne* potentially limits these possibilities, as I will argue in the next section.

## 4. The Possibility of Practical Wisdom

Certain features of Gadamer's rehabilitation and reconceptualization of phronesis make it better suited to contemporary, pluralist societies than Aristotle's original conception. Most importantly, Gadamer explicitly situates practical judgments about ends and means in the context of dialogue. In a 1978 article, he argues that the exercise of phronesis depends upon "being habitually understanding towards others" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 132). An openness to the presence of others and their claims, in Gadamer's view, is necessary for making practical judgments about the ends we should pursue and how to achieve them. Encounters of understanding are, for him, necessarily dialogical, so in making social and political judgments, we gain a sense of the relevant contexts and their possibilities by falling into conversation with others. In so doing, we tap into what Gadamer in the same article calls "a kind of communality in virtue," the shared moral understandings that underlie communities and bind their members to each other. Practical wisdom, he clarifies, is "not to be thought of as a neutral capacity for finding the practical means for correct purposes or ends" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 133). In other words, it is not mere pragmatic rationality or prudence. Instead its exercise always also involves making choices about what goods or purposes to pursue in a specific social and political context.

As such, Gadamer argues, practical wisdom is "indispensably bound up" with ethos (Gadamer, 1981, p. 133). The exercise of phronesis presupposes that we been shaped by the moral norms and convictions that lie at the basis of our social and political life, and when we make judgments about ends and means in a specific context, in dialogue with others, we draw on these norms and convictions. Gadamer's reading of the cave allegory recounted above highlights this interrelationship between practical wisdom and ethos. Those who return to the cave exercise practical wisdom in making choices that, as he puts it, already contain a "living awareness" of the good (Gadamer, 1986, p. 163). Their practical choices about ends and means already presume certain shared ends, and so practical wisdom for Gadamer has inherently communal dimensions. While the degree to which individuals exhibit this capacity will vary, that variance will always be constrained, and enabled, by the ethos in which and through which they have been formed. Ethos not only shapes but is also sustained by the exercise of phronesis.

The dialogical and communal dimensions of Gadamer's version of practical wisdom detach it from a singular, transcendental conception of the good. The habits, norms, and convictions that constitute *ethos* and form the basis of practical wisdom not only differ from society to society, but they also change within a given society over time. Practical wisdom must also necessarily change with place and time, given that its exercise draws on these shared, evolving moral understandings and convictions, rather than being guided by an intuitively-known, singular conception of the good. Gadamer's hermeneutical recovery of practical wisdom, with his emphasis on its dialogical and communal dimensions, allows practical wisdom to be relevant as a civic capacity in contemporary societies in which goods are seen not as transcendental and universal but immanent and plural.

Gadamer's reconceptualization also highlights the ways that a capacity for practical wisdom can serve as an antidote to ideological thinking, one of the contributing factors in the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories. In a 1980 essay, "The Ideal

of Practical Philosophy," Gadamer describes the practically wise person as one who has "overcome the temptation to dogmatism that goes with all supposed knowledge" (1998, p. 58). Dogmatism impedes our ability to make practical judgments since it denies the relevance of context and, consequently, the need for dialogue. When we succumb to dogmatism, we have no use for context because we see every situation simply as an opportunity to apply something we already know; dialogue, similarly, becomes unnecessary and a waste of time. Making social and political choices under the sway of dogmatism does not involve the exercise of *phronesis* but instead resembles the exercise of instrumental rationality or mere prudence, in which the ends are pre-given and all that must be decided is how to achieve them.

Overcoming the temptation to dogmatism requires the habitual openness toward others that Gadamer advocates in his earlier essay. By assessing, in part through dialogue with others, the context, possibilities, and stakes of political choices, we can discern what goals and means are appropriate and commit ourselves to them. Doing so will most likely disrupt some of our prior assessments and commitments, whether presumed or explicit. In this way, in Gadamer's view, the exercise of practical wisdom helps prevent our norms and convictions, the ground of *ethos*, from calcifying into mere indoctrination or enforced conformism. The exercise of practical wisdom involves the acceptance of others, the sharing of ideas, and, thereby, the construction of a common world (1998, p. 59). The ongoing interdependence of *phronesis* and *ethos*, in which the exercise of the former both draws from and transforms the latter, thus undermines dogmatism and ideological thinking.

As I mentioned earlier, the dogmatism preoccupying Gadamer at the time of his writing was excessive deference to science and technology, to the detriment of the contextual knowledge of the human sciences. Seeing social and political issues as mere problems to be solved by the application of technical solutions transforms all knowledge into *techne*, in Gadamer's view. His concern is that this category error contributes toward the erosion of both our shared

moral understandings and our capacity for practical wisdom. His defense of the human sciences and his reinvigoration of Aristotelian ethical and political theory were meant to help counter these threats. But these are not necessarily the same threats we face today. Unquestioning deference to scientific and technical expertise hardly seems like a primary problem right now, as we have seen in response to both the COVID-19 pandemic and to the climate change crisis. In each case, significant groups of citizens have refused to accept a broad scientific consensus on causes and mitigation strategies. We instead live in an era of historically low trust in institutions, especially those engaged in scientific research and knowledge production and those government agencies tasked with addressing scientific and public health problems. In order for Gadamer's reconceptualized and reinvigorated conception of practical wisdom to serve as a democratic resource in this new context, marked by a flood of misinformation and conspiracy theories, at least two issues need to be addressed.

The first is the role that political polarization and social sorting play in the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories. As section two of this chapter argues, reputational pressures and information bubbles aid the spread of misinformation. Given that many citizens interact regularly only with those who also already share their political and social views, these views appear as common sensical, and there are few incentives, and perhaps significant costs, for citizens to question, contextualize, and complicate them. In these circumstances, the interdependence of phronesis and ethos that Gadamer articulates becomes a negative feedback loop rather than a way that shared convictions and understandings are drawn upon and transformed. If the shared understandings underlying the exercise of practical wisdom are shared only because a subcommunity also shares a partisan identity, the resulting judgments will simply reinforce ideological thinking and dogmatism. Rather than choosing ends and means in a particular situation by drawing on a communality of virtue, practical judgments will instead will resemble the application of something already known, the same problem that Gadamer associated with deference to scientific and technical rationality.

This social sorting and partisanization of identity is a serious, challenging problem in the United States and other democracies right now. The problem has been exacerbated by social media habits and the algorithms that underlie social media platforms. For practical wisdom to serve as a resource for democracy today, especially as an antidote to misinformation and conspiratorial thinking, the dialogical and communal dimensions of practical wisdom must extend beyond partisan echo chambers and polarized subgroups. Scholars of Gadamer have argued – convincingly, in my view – that implicit in his dialogical account of understanding is the presence of others who are unlike us (see especially Risser 1997 and Walhof 2017). But it is also understandable that some read Gadamer as presuming that there is a single tradition and community over time that provides a commonality of virtue, with little need for, or emphasis on, diverse experiences and voices as part of this community. If citizens are to make judgments about ends and means in the context of complexity and uncertainty, the dependence of practical wisdom on the presence of others unlike us must be made explicit, not left implicit. Nonpoliticized interactions among diverse citizens are especially important, since these interactions can help reveal and buttress some of the shared understandings and convictions on which practical wisdom depends and which get obscured by polarization and partisan identities. The relationships these nonpoliticized interactions support help undermine the dogmatism prevalent in a polarized polity. In so doing, they can also help foster the comfort with uncertainty and complexity needed to resist the allure of misinformation and conspiracy theories.

The second, related issue that needs to be addressed is the problem of decontextualized knowledge claims. Making judgments in situations of complexity and uncertainty involves assessing the context in which such judgments must be made, including what is (and is not) known, the relevance and relative reliability of information, the options available and their possible consequences, and the moral and political stakes involved. Democratic discourse today, however, is awash in bits of information that actively resist this kind of assessment. Tweets, audio and video clips, memes, and gifs are presented as if they accurately and fully capture a political dispute, a policy proposal, or a persuasive argument. Citizens accept them as informative in and of themselves and pass them along to like-minded friends and associates. Rarely are these information bits meant to, or do they, suggest the need for a better understanding of context and nuance, or even the need for any kind of judgment at all. Indeed, these information bits specifically work, and are meant to work, to close down rather than open up the possibility of judgment. The presumption is that no judgment is even required, since the truth is presented as self-evident, and so only someone who is deranged or evil would think otherwise. The decontextualized nature of these information bits is partly the source of their power.

A Gadamerian sense of practical wisdom includes an impulse towards contextualization. To build immunity to the lure of decontextualized knowledge that merely reaffirms their views, citizens have to resist the immediate temptation of simply absorbing and passing along these information bits. Practically wise citizens must be able first to recognize a situation as a situation involving uncertainty and complexity and thus requiring judgment. This recognition would then also entail a desire to know more, in order to contextualize the alleged information or claim. This search for context would also include asking what emotional response the decontextualized information is meant to provoke and why. Is this trying to get me to feel fear, anger, disgust, self-satisfaction, or superiority to others? What are the consequences of invoking these feelings? Whose interests are being served in catalyzing these responses?

#### 5. Conclusions

Together these two issues — political polarization with attendant social sorting and the pervasiveness of decontextualized knowledge claims — highlight that the practical wisdom needed to meet the

challenge of misinformation and conspiracy theories must be more than an epistemic capacity. Recent democratic theory has sought to meet the challenge of misinformation primarily through better forms of democratic deliberation combined with improved informational literacy (Chambers, 2021; Fishkin, 2018; McKay and Tenove, 2021). While informational literacy and informed democratic deliberation are certainly needed to buttress democratic practices and institutions, research shows, unfortunately, that countering misinformation with accurate facts does little to change political views, especially in the long run (Carey et al., 2022). Treating the challenge of misinformation primarily in epistemic terms is insufficient. Indeed, citizens drawn to conspiracy theories are often obsessed with seeking out information, albeit in ways that do not impel them outside their information bubbles and partisan communities. In addition, citizens drawn to conspiracy theories also often maintain a posture of a kind of critical thinking, saying that they "are just asking questions." This response of just asking questions becomes the default response to counter-arguments.

Practical wisdom as a civic capacity that can help meet the threat of misinformation is not mere skepticism or open-mindedness, in the sense of withholding judgment until one has weighed the available evidence. The development of practical wisdom must also include the cultivation of a set of dispositions. First, practically wise citizens must not only recognize, but also be comfortable with, situations demanding judgment and contextualization. Otherwise they will prematurely foreclose the search for context simply to avoid the discomfort that attends uncertainty and complexity. Second, practically wise citizens must approach other citizens and decontextualized information with a degree of humility, expressed as a hesitation to think one knows fully and an openness to discovering more. Finally, practically wise citizens must exhibit a type of fortitude that resists the temptations posed by melodramatic narratives, fear-mongering, and reputational pressures.

The challenges posed by misinformation and conspiracy theories in the context of decontextualized knowledge claims, polari-

zation, and social sorting point to the need for practical wisdom as an organizing concept for democratic civic capacities. The philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer offer a rich resource for conceptualizing practical wisdom in ways that include an openness to others in dialogue along with needed dispositions of humility, fortitude, and comfort with uncertainty and complexity. Furthering the development of hermeneutic practical wisdom as a democratic civic capacity will enable citizens to judge what is good and possible in social and political contexts. Developing this capacity will also help them become less susceptible to the kind of conspiratorial thinking that threatens democracy today.

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## CUARTA SECCIÓN FOURTH PART

## FILOSOFÍA Y RELIGIÓN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

## CAPÍTULO X / CHAPTER X

# ONTHE RELATION OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY: GADAMER AND STRAUSS

Walter Lammi

### **RESUMEN**

En este capítulo, examino la relación entre religión y filosofía a través de un análisis comparativo de Hans-Georg Gadamer y Leo Strauss. La cuestión de la relación entre religión y filosofía es de suma importancia dado que ambas se ocupan del sentido de la vida y, en última instancia, de lo divino. Strauss considera la filosofía y la religión como incompatibles, mientras que Gadamer las comprende como interconectadas. Exploro una comprensión más profunda de las perspectivas de ambos pensadores sobre esta relación a través de su pensamiento sobre tres dicotomías del pensamiento griego: filosofía griega vs. experiencia cultual; *logos* y *mythos*; y *theoria* y *praxis*. Mientras Strauss enfatiza una clara separación en cada una de estas dicotomías, Gadamer encuentra conexiones en cada una. Primero, para Gadamer, la experiencia cultual es la experiencia de

lo divino mediada para la filosofía por el arte. Strauss, sin embargo, no considera esta experiencia como relevante aunque otorga importancia a la preocupación filosófica por lo infinito. Segundo, Gadamer ve el *mythos* como los límites del *logos*, mientras que para Strauss la cuestión no es sobre los límites del *mythos* sino más bien sobre una forma diferente de pensar la naturaleza. Tercero, Strauss diferencia entre filosofía y filosofía práctica, considerando la primera como contemplación pura y el objetivo primario del filósofo. En contraste, Gadamer entiende la *theoria* como la *praxis* más elevada donde la contemplación y la experiencia, o *noesis* y *pathe*, convergen. En conclusión, para Gadamer, filosofía y religión están estrechamente entrelazadas, mientras que para Strauss deben permanecer eternamente separadas.

Palabras clave: filosofía, religión, Gadamer, Strauss, filosofía griega, divino.

#### **ABSTRACT**

In this chapter, I examine the relation of religion and philosophy through a comparative analysis of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Leo Strauss. The question of the relation of religion and philosophy is of paramount importance since both are concerned with the meaning of life, and ultimately the divine. Strauss sees philosophy and religion as incompatible, whereas Gadamer understands both to be interconnected. I explore a deeper understanding of both thinkers' views on this relationship through their thought on three dichotomies in Greek thinking: Greek philosophy vs. cultic experience; logos and mythos; and theoria and praxis. While Strauss emphasises a clear separation in each of these dichotomies, Gadamer finds connections in each. First, for Gadamer, the cultic experience is the experience of the divine mediated for philosophy by art. Strauss, however, does not consider this experience of relevance although he places importance on the philosophic concern with the infinite. Second, Gadamer sees the *mythos* as the limits of the *logos*, while for Strauss the question is not one of the limits of *mythos* but rather about a different way to think about nature. Third, Strauss differentiates between philosophy and practical philosophy, viewing the former as pure contemplation and the primary goal of the philosopher. In contrast, Gadamer understands *theoria* to be the highest *praxis* whereby contemplation and experience or *noesis* and *pathe* converge. In conclusion, for Gadamer, philosophy and religion are closely intertwined, while for Strauss, they must remain forever separate.

**Keywords:** philosophy, religion, Gadamer, Strauss, Greek philosophy, the divine.

#### 1. Introduction

A first step towards exploring the relation of religion and philosophy is to ask how one can talk about the divine in conceptual or philosophic language. Here I approach that question in terms of a comparison between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Leo Strauss, two thinkers who have greatly influenced me, to help clarify the issue at hand by way of their thinking about religion and the ancient Greeks in particular, culminating in a disagreement that, to my knowledge, was never publicly articulated as such. It is not always the case that disagreement among thinkers can only or best be understood in terms of explicit debate. In this case, the tacit debate turns out to be paradigmatic for two philosophical alternatives for understanding the relation of religion and philosophy.

These alternatives may be characterized as follows. Strauss is known for his emphasis on the conflict between philosophy and religion, especially in terms of the opposition of reason and faith or reason and that kind of revelation which can only be known to us ordinary mortals through faith<sup>1</sup>. One of Strauss' major objections

Strauss speaks, for example, of "the absurd entanglement of a nomos-tradition with a philosophical tradition, i.e. Biblical Revelation with Greek philosophy, a tradition of obedience with a 'tradition' of questioning..." (2001, p. 406, my translation). This example, chosen more or less at random, could be multiplied indefinitely. Nonetheless,

to Heideggerian thinking is that it not only downplays that opposition, but is itself intrinsically religious or revelatory and thereby betrays the autonomy of reason—an autonomy that is crucial for preventing philosophy from slipping into handmaiden to faith, as happened in the Christian tradition (Strauss, 1953, pp. 74–75), or into the dangerous obscurantism into which he believed that Heidegger himself had slipped. Strauss would insist on a kind of *cordon sanitaire* between philosophy and religion, whereby never the twain would meet. Gadamer, on the other hand, finds reciprocity between religion and philosophy whereby the two are closely intertwined (Gadamer, 1999, p. 81), and he considered this to be an important difference between himself and Strauss<sup>2</sup>.

Yet up to a point, Gadamer is at one with Strauss' view. He calls the opposition between reason and revelation in religions of the book to be "an unsolvable contradiction impossible to hide" (Gadamer, 1992, p. 60). Both consider philosophy and theology to be very different activities. Gadamer, like Strauss, was in close contact with the theologically charged atmosphere of the existentialist Rudolf Bultmann's University of Marburg (where they first met as young men), yet both abjure theology for themselves. In Gadamer's analysis, theology is faith-based dialogue with doubt

there always remains serious difficulty with characterizing Strauss' views because his thinking is difficult to access. The Strauss described in this paper is a simplification that abstracts from the quarrel among the Straussian school wherein the 'West Coast' members argue against the 'East Coast' members that ultimately Strauss *does* reconcile religion and philosophy. For discussion of these complexities, see Sorenson (2006, pp. 30–53). I do not choose to enter into this debate: my interpretation of Strauss is a 'standard' one (see Sorenson, 2006, p. 31), and it is taken as such for purposes of this discussion—which are to illuminate wider issues rather than to engage in intramural quarrels. Whether 'this' Strauss is the 'real' Strauss is consequently irrelevant to whether it helps us to come to grips with the philosophical issues of the relation of religion and philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> From notes of a conversation with the author, Heidelberg, July 15, 1998: The Straussians are a sect, Gadamer commented, but they have been quite tolerant toward him. Strauss he described as a friend. However, he said, Strauss had become convinced that there is an absolute separation between Athens and Jerusalem, philosophy and religion, whereas his own view is that they are not only not in necessary conflict, but inseparably connected.

and atheism and constitutes a "secondary form of reflection" not to be confused with philosophy (1977, p. 392). Nor does Gadamer invoke the gods or seek to lay the religious groundwork for a world-society, as Strauss sees Heidegger as doing<sup>3</sup> (Strauss, 1989, pp. 42–43). Nor is philosophy to Gadamer intrinsically religious in the sense Strauss attributes to Heidegger and originally to Nietzsche, where the "philosopher of the future," himself atheist, awaits the coming of a new God (Strauss, 1995, p. 315). And certainly, like Strauss, he does not agree with Hegel that philosophy should try to or can replace religious faith with conceptual knowledge.

To Gadamer as to Strauss, the element of competition between philosophy and religion is inevitable insofar as both are concerned with ultimate questions of life and meaning. They agree furthermore that there is no historical progress in philosophy. And they agree that reason requires one to study matters autonomously and bring them to conceptual language. Although to grasp the meaning of 'conceptual' is a great problem, it is remarkable that both have independently quoted the same Hegel passage regarding the differences between ancient and modern conceptuality, to the effect that whereas the problem for the ancients was to make universals from the lived stream of particulars, the moderns have the opposite problem in that we take our universals ready-made and have lost touch with factical life<sup>4</sup> (Hegel, 1977, pp. 19–20, §33).

Thus the Greek embrace of lived experience was of the greatest importance for both thinkers, and both, as is well known, turned their own thinking in the direction of the Greeks. To turn to the Greeks obviates the most vexing questions of faith or belief, since the mythic-cultic tradition as opposed to religions of the book required no belief<sup>5</sup>. The same holds for revelation, since there

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer makes himself very clear: "I do not follow Heidegger at all when he talks about new gods and similar things" (1984, p. 10).

<sup>4</sup> Strauss refers to the question in "Political Philosophy and History," (1973, p. 75). Gadamer's reference is in "Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers," (1976, p. 8).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Socrates Frömmigkeit des Nichtwissens," (GW 7, p. 88): "The concept of belief has no application to the Greek relation to their gods."

are no canonically privileged revelatory acts, unlike in religions of the book<sup>6</sup>. Nor is it possible to set classical 'natural theology' against revelation. By undermining the opposition of 'natural' and faith-based theology, this focus on classical natural theology already softens the distinction between philosophical reasoning and conversation about the divine. One might argue that this effectively takes the 'religion' out of religion, but if it helps to illuminate the common subject matter of the divine, questions of reason versus faith may be seen as substantively subordinate.

Indeed, as both Strauss and Gadamer had occasion to point out, there is not even any word for 'religion' in ancient Greek. We shall have to use the term loosely, as indeed it is generally used in conventional scholarship. In a letter to the philosopher Eric Voegelin, Strauss clarifies this point:

Well, you speak of the religious foundation of classical philosophy. I would not do so simply for the reason that there is no Greek word for 'religion.' One would have to speak of God or of the divine... (Strauss, 1993, p. 78)<sup>7</sup>

For Gadamer too, Greek 'religion' is a matter of experience. Like all experience it seeks to come to language—yet for Gadamer the issue is not conceptual or philosophical recognition, but rather the phenomenological experience itself and its hermeneutical translation by way of literary and artistic evidence.

I suggest that the views of Strauss and Gadamer on this critical question of 'religious' experience may be succinctly contrasted in terms of three interconnected dichotomies in Greek thinking. These are: (1) Greek philosophy vs. Greek cultic experience; (2) logos and mythos, and (3) theoria and praxis. Strauss insists on viewing each of

<sup>6</sup> Although of course there were special epiphanies, as with the first appearance of a goddess to her cult, the gods appear in Homer at critical times of life in ways that are only visible to the protagonist and the poet. The multiple and multifarious divine epiphanies of Olympian religion are clearly closer to the cultic tradition than to religions of the book.

<sup>7</sup> Letter no. 37.

these dichotomies as essentially discontinuous, whereas for Gadamer the separation in each proves not to be so strict.

## 2. Philosophy and Cultic Experience

The experience of the mystery cults remains conjectural, the evidence being largely either circumstantial or from Christian opponents of a much later age. It comprises the unspoken and unspeakable, the *arrheton* in Greek. The limit of speech in the cultic experience of the divine to Gadamer, however, reflects the aporia of philosophy, which is always particularly in need of language and struggling with language<sup>8</sup>. Its task is, strictly speaking, impossible. Philosophy brings language to the realm of the conceptual, but the divine cannot be understood as a concept or measured according to concepts<sup>9</sup>. The 'concept of the divine' is an oxymoron—or aporia—yet it is in the end the aporia of philosophy itself, that there is "something beyond conceptual thinking that can claim to be true" (1984, p. 11)<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, philosophy to Gadamer is indeed intrinsically religious.

Although the philosophic quest independently to conceptualize the arrheton refers back to the cultic mysteries both historically and thematically, Gadamer no less than Strauss resists attempts to derive philosophy from mystical religion<sup>11</sup>. Strauss writes, "[T]he

<sup>8 &</sup>quot;Hermeneutics," says Gadamer, "is a response to the challenge of the not-understood or not understandable—the other, the strange, the dark—and perhaps the deepest that we must understand." (GW 10, p. 6).

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer points out that "...the experience of Being itself, which articulates itself in statement, cannot be measured by the statement or thought in which it presents itself" (1994, p. 145).

<sup>10</sup> Gadamer argues thus with specific reference here to his agreement with Heidegger regarding the paradigmatic case of the work of art. Earlier in this essay Gadamer refers to "the central issue of the place of conceptual thinking as such," and adds: "Both Socrates and Plato maintained a certain distantiated conformism with the cult, but behind it lurks the conviction that there is the divine, [but] to Plato we cannot conceptualize the idea of the good." Elsewhere he describes the experience of the divine "as an incomprehensible, mysterious, nonconceptual presence and power" (1993, p. 99, my translation).

<sup>11 &</sup>quot;Nothing," Gadamer has observed, "is less likely than that Greek philosophy arises from the spirit of mysticism." (1999a, p. 39 and n. 39, p. 164).

one thing needful according to Greek philosophy is the life of autonomous understanding" (1989, p. 246). Gadamer would agree. Philosophy in Gadamer's view developed not directly from the mystical, from philosophic access to cultic access to the arrheton, but indirectly through the literary tradition of Greece, through mythology. Art and myth are essential intermediaries between cultic experience and philosophy. It is nonetheless a massive cultural and historical fact that powerful mystery cults were always "washing against the small land of Greece from all sides," in Gadamer's description (1993a, p. 98). One can therefore speak of a cultic-mythic and then a mythic-philosophical tradition. Gadamer argues that philosophy stems from this mythic tradition, as opposed to sophistry, which is tied to the 'intellectualism' of the Greek Enlightenment.

Thus for Gadamer, in contrast to Strauss, the roots of philosophy by way of poetry are religious, and the truths of philosophy hearken back to religion as well. For Strauss, philosophy is incompatible with religion; for Gadamer, philosophy seeks to purify religion. Philosophy provides the Greeks with a balance between the intellectualism of sophistry on the one hand and of being swept into cultic experience on the other.

Following Gadamer, one could call this concern with the 'realm of the divine' from the perspective of human finitude. Yet Gadamer considers all experience to be precisely experience of finitude, and he explicitly denies the force of the "obvious" argument that the finite can only be seen as such in light of the infinite 12. This argument is 'logical' as opposed to 'experiential,' and experience to Gadamer is the *sine qua non* of knowledge. Strauss, to the con-

<sup>12 &</sup>quot;It seems to me that it is essential for taking finitude seriously as the basis of every experience of Being that such experience renounce all dialectical supplementation. To be sure, it is 'obvious' that finitude is a privative determination of thought and as such presupposes its opposite, transcendence, or history or (in another way) nature. Who will deny that? I contend, however, that we have learned once and for all from Kant that such 'obvious' ways of thought can mediate no possible knowledge for us finite beings. Dependence on possible experience and demonstration by means of it remains the alpha and omega of all responsible thought" (Gadamer, 1976, p. 172).

trary, argues that the perspective of ineluctable finitude precisely requires the "light of infinity"; the very notion of the 'finite' entails the infinite. To be consistent Gadamer, in Strauss' view, can have nothing to say about the divine, which means no awareness of the whole <sup>13</sup>. Yet somehow for Gadamer "ineluctable" finitude does not preclude a glimpse of the infinite whole such that, as Gadamer has said of Heidegger, one is "brushed by an echo of the experience of Being" (1994, p. 144).

Strauss speaks similarly of the philosopher "who as such has had a glimpse of the eternal order" (1959, p. 121). However, that "as such" indicates that for Strauss the glimpse is purely philosophical or conceptual whereas for Gadamer it is experiential. I suggest that the solution to this conundrum of finitude lies in Gadamer's study of cultic experience and its relation to art. Gadamer likens cultic ceremony to the "original and still vital essence of festive celebration" that creates an altered sense of time and transformed state of being (1983a, p. 59). In this sense, the divine may be said actually to descend upon the cultic group "like a bodily appearance," as Gadamer puts it (GW 8, p. 389). To Gadamer this experience is most clearly identified in the work of art. Like cultic epiphany, the work of art is characterized by a heightened level of being (GW 8, p. 383) and has the power to reach us without mediation (GW 8, p. 375). Gadamer calls the absolute presence of the divine in the immediate presence of the work of art its "aura" (GW 8, p. 378), and what he terms "tarrying" with the work of art is "perhaps the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity" (1983b, p. 45).

Thus cultic experience is the experience of the divine mediated for philosophy by art. Gadamer takes that experience seriously. Strauss does not, although Strauss does take seriously the philosophic concern with the infinite. Clearly, this difference is critically

<sup>13 &</sup>quot;The highest form of knowledge was said to be finite knowledge of finiteness: yet how can finiteness be seen as finiteness if it is not seen in the light of infinity? Or in other words it was said that we cannot know the whole, but does this not necessarily presuppose awareness of the whole?" (Strauss, 1995, p. 313).

important to their different evaluations of the relation of religion and philosophy.

## 3. Logos and Mythos

The way the divine is brought to words is for Gadamer, then, originally a matter of poetry and myth that itself reaches back to religious experience, for all genuine art has something of the sacred about it (1993b, p. 150). As late as Parmenides' poem, philosophy itself was expressed mythically and poetically, however much it was achieving independent status for reasoning. For Strauss the development of this division is fundamental for philosophy. In fact, Gadamer largely agrees. One way to put the agreement is that to Gadamer, the issue in philosophy becomes the order of being, whereas in cultic worship, it remains purely a matter of experience (passivity, *pathe*). Aristotle opposed this suffering of experience in cultic religion to *mathein*, the learning matters that do not require experience<sup>14</sup>.

Both Gadamer and Strauss trace logos in the sense of autonomous reason to mathematics. Gadamer sees the unsolvable problem of irrational numbers as forcing Greek science to face the limits of formal or mathematical reason. In mathematics, this led, as their mutual friend Jacob Klein put it, to a thoroughgoing "geometrization" of Greek mathematics<sup>15</sup> (1979, p. 4). This turns investigation to "how" being is as a whole rather than to "what-is." Strauss insists that the whole must be "in principle" fully intelligible as a condition of philosophy, whereas for Gadamer there is no such principle: human finitude precludes total intelligibility. The kind of measure appropriate to the divine, Gadamer concludes, is not the mathematically exact but rather the measure of balance, the whole, the divine whole—for human beings that remains, as Gadamer has said, ultimately a practical concept (1985, p. 80).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by the close friend of both Strauss and Gadamer, Gerhard Krüger (1939, p. 61).

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Klein's Greek Mathematics and the Origin of Algebra was written while Klein was staying at Gadamer's home in Marburg in 1933 and 1934. See reference in Grondin 1999 (p. 178). Gadamer credits Klein's book with causing him to rethink his whole approach to the Greeks.

The shape of the divine, or how the whole of being 'holds itself' in unity in the absence of an Atlas, was a central problematic of the Presocratics (Gadamer, 1999a, p. 43). Plato brought this cosmology to a conclusion with the five Platonic solids comprising Euclidian geometry in the shape of a cone, and with the related image of a top in which rest and motion are combined in a way which "illustrates the enigmatic nature of thought, which for its part really is in no time," as Gadamer puts it (1983c, p. 15). As opposed to Strauss's emphasis on ancient 'proofs' of the divine through the analysis of motion, Gadamer sees the effort of Greek philosophy as learning above all the 'how' of the divine in that analysis of motion. To Gadamer all 'proofs' of the divine are suspect, being persuasive only to those who are already persuaded, and he questions how seriously or literally they were intended. Gadamer comments that whenever Plato has to deal with such ultimate questions, he turns to conceptually rich myths which "everywhere" express the unity of the divine (1999a, p. 141). The Platonic dialogues are an interweaving of mythos and logos. Strauss, however, insists upon an absolute distinction: "To give some meaning to the term 'mythology,' which I am here forced to use, I would say that mythology is characterized by the conflict between gods and impersonal powers behind the gods.... Now philosophy replaces this impersonal fate, as we might say, by nature and intelligible necessity" (1993, p. 219).

The difference between these thinkers again becomes clear. For Gadamer mythos points to the limits of logos; for Strauss it is a matter not of the limits of logos, but of a whole different way to think about nature.

#### 4. Theoria and Praxis

The logos is partly a question of the relative mixture of mathematics or *mathema*, which can be learned without experience, and what Aristotle founded as 'practical philosophy,' which includes ethical and political deliberation, moderation and prudence, and requires experience. For Strauss, first philosophy and practical philosophy are separate activities—theoria being pure contemplation and the

true goal of the philosopher, and praxis being of second rank, although that rank is very high indeed in the paradigmatic case of the statesman. For his part, Gadamer stresses that practical reason is a kind of knowledge, so that to him practice and theory constitute a distinction within knowledge.

Gadamer finds theoria to be the highest praxis in two ways. First, it combines the greatest human activity with the greatest human experience (pathe), with a balance of active and passive redolent of the balance of motion and rest in the image of the whirling top. Gadamer reminds us that in its original usage, theoria referred to participation in religious festivals or attendance at theater productions, a looking on and taking in that also meant involvement (1998a, p. 31). Here we see almost a convergence of philosophical contemplation and the altered temporality of the cultic. Second, theoria refers to times of the activity of noesis when, as Aristotle put it, man comes as close as mortal beings can come to the divine. These are intermittent in the life of human beings, which is necessarily a mixture of the practical and the theoretical. The Greek term noesis, usually translated as 'contemplation' or 'intellectual intuition,' can shift in meaning from 'openness to experience' to 'rational thinking.' In Gadamer's interpretation, the activity of noesis carries with it an experiential basis, a suffering or pathe which, in fact, provides the connection with the cultic. Gadamer traces its likely etymology back to the way that an animal in the forest, with its instincts aroused, becomes aware of a predator in its vicinity (1998b).

Strauss too translates *nous* "cautiously" he says, as "awareness" (1993, p. 229). Yet this seems to be the awareness of thinking more than the awareness of instinctive experience<sup>16</sup>. Again we come to a limit to mathematical reason insofar as logos is connected to nous. Is logos, as Aristotle develops the term, better translated as 'language,' or as 'reason' or 'logic'? For Gadamer, the former trans-

<sup>16</sup> See Gadamer 1998 (p. 101): "We usually render the word noein in translation as 'thinking'; however we should not forget that the primary meaning of the word is not to become absorbed in oneself, not reflection, but, on the contrary, pure openness for everything."

lation, which was suggested by Heidegger, opened new paths for thinking. Strauss does not follow the route of the 'linguistic turn.' For him 'reason' seems to be a matter of reasoning guided by the rules of logic, which may culminate in the awareness of noesis but constitutes the autonomous activity we call philosophy.

This is a matter of emphasis, but not only a matter of emphasis. It is also a matter of the direction of philosophical passion or eros. Gadamer and Strauss both stress the role of friendship in classical philosophy. Philosophy cannot be separated from the practice of philosophy any more than 'love of wisdom' can be separated from 'love.' The difference is that where Strauss describes the passionate element of philosophy as eros "graced by nature's grace" (1989, p. 39), Gadamer follows the trail to a darker notion of love's passion among the Greeks and hence an opening to terror as well among the fundamental experiences of philosophy—as it is of religion (Krüger, 1939, pp. 16–17)<sup>17</sup>.

#### 5. Conclusions

In this discussion I have traced several subtle differences between Strauss and Gadamer that conclude in a massive difference between them regarding the relationship of philosophy and religion: we have seen that to Gadamer, philosophy and religion are inextricably intertwined, while to Strauss, they must remain forever separate. In Strauss's view, "philosophy recognizes only such experiences as can be had by all men at all times in broad daylight" (1993, p. 229). In Gadamer's view, philosophy in tandem with religion is able to bring rare and difficult experiences to such recognition as can be had by all.

<sup>17</sup> See Gadamer 1985 (p. 66). Gadamer refers his own views on the religious background of Greek philosophy to "Einsicht und Leidenschaft" in The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy (1986, p. 28).

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# CAPÍTULO XI / CHAPTER XI

# GADAMER'S "CLASSICAL" PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Abdullah Başaran

#### RESUMEN

Este capítulo explora el enfoque de Hans-Georg Gadamer sobre la religión, argumentando que el concepto de lo divino va más allá de las creencias religiosas tradicionales y se centra en la experiencia humana de la finitud. Gadamer enfatiza la importancia de la lectura de textos clásicos, tanto religiosos como no religiosos, como una forma de confrontar nuestras limitaciones y explorar el concepto de lo absoluto. En este sentido, aun no siendo un teólogo, Gadamer analiza textos griegos antiguos y temas cristianos para comprender cómo diferentes culturas lidian con la mortalidad y la cuestión de lo divino. Aboga por una "apreciación estética" de lo divino, centrándose en experimentar la verdad sobre la finitud humana más que en buscar respuestas teológicas definitivas. Gadamer reconoce el potencial declive de la religión tradicional pero sugiere que el en-

cuentro humano con la mortalidad permanece como una constante a través de las culturas y puede ser explorado mediante diversas tradiciones religiosas. Pues la fe y la práctica religiosa, en la comprensión de Gadamer, son modos de encontrarse con la verdad, no mediante la lógica sino a través del compromiso concreto con textos y rituales sagrados. La filosofía de la religión de Gadamer no trata sobre adherir a una fe específica sino sobre comprender cómo los humanos encuentran y lidian con el concepto de lo divino a lo largo de la historia y a través de las culturas. Mediante un proceso de lectura activa e interpretación, particularmente de textos clásicos, podemos obtener una consciencia más profunda de nuestras limitaciones y lo absoluto, incluso frente al declive de la creencia religiosa en el mundo moderno.

Palabras clave: Hans-Georg Gadamer, filosofía de la religión, teología, divinidad, finitud humana, lectura e interpretación de los clásicos.

#### ABSTRACT

This chapter explores Hans-Georg Gadamer's approach to religion, arguing that the concept of the divine goes beyond traditional religious beliefs and focuses on the human experience of finitude. He emphasizes the importance of reading classical texts, both religious and non-religious, as a way to confront our limitations and explore the concept of the absolute. In this sense, while not a theologian himself, Gadamer analyzes ancient Greek texts and Christian themes to understand how different cultures engage with mortality and the question of the divine. He advocates for an "aesthetic appreciation" of the divine, focusing on experiencing the truth about human finitude rather than seeking definitive theological answers. Gadamer acknowledges the potential decline of traditional religion but suggests that the human encounter with mortality remains a constant across cultures and can be explored through diverse religious traditions. For faith and religious practice, in Gadamer's

understanding, are ways of encountering truth, not through logic but through concrete engagement with sacred texts and rituals. Gadamer's philosophy of religion is not about subscribing to a specific faith but about understanding how humans encounter and grapple with the concept of the divine throughout history and across cultures. Through a process of active reading and interpretation, particularly of classical texts, we can gain a deeper awareness of our limitations and the absolute, even in the face of declining religious belief in the modern world.

**Keywords:** Hans-Georg Gadamer, philosophy of religion, theology, divinity, human finitude, reading and interpretation of the classics.

"An unavoidable question for us—a hope perhaps, or, rather, a task that unites us all in our mutual understanding. This ultimate ethical task cannot be separated from the one task of questioning and understanding our existence".

(Gadamer, 2006, p. 143)

#### 1. Introduction

Hans-Georg Gadamer's student years were marked by his encounter with the famed theologian Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg. Their fifteen years reading the Ancient Greek classics together undoubtedly influenced Gadamer's views on reading *eminent texts*. This affinity with Bultmann also led Gadamer to be concerned with theological and religious problems, or at least to understand their significance in the philosophical tradition. This is evident in the diversity of his work on these matters: a hermeneutic proposal for religious texts to (re)speak to readers, the significance of Christ's incarnation in explaining human language, the unique status of religious texts compared to other eminent texts, the question of the

divine in ancient Greek thought between *mythos* and *logos*, religion and religiosity as an unavoidable element of culture, and the hermeneutical awareness of human finitude and religion offering solace in the face of human mortality.

This orientation of Gadamer, however, should not be misconstrued: his interest in these matters does not stem from personal theological or religious convictions, but rather from understanding the unique experience of truth that emerges through faith (e.g., Christianity) or conceptualizing the divine through inceptual thinking (e.g., ancient Greeks). The experience of truth in Christianity is distinct from the truth of art, poetry, and literature: for Gadamer, accepting the doctrines of the sacred text and practicing faith is a striking example of truth manifesting not through universal methods but through concrete practice and phronetic application. Similarly, Gadamer's original interest in the experience of truth in religious problems extends to how ancient Greeks, grappling with mortality in the face of immortal gods and heroes, navigated their relationship with these divinities and understood being through divinity. Even for those who do not subscribe to the Judeo-Christian God, Gadamer argues, we still have a religious dimension where we experience the divine, highlighting human finitude. However, this experience finds expression not in revealed books or the scriptures but in the poetic word—raising more questions than providing answers. Therefore, according to Gadamer, the true experience of the divine is ultimately an aesthetic one.

That being the case, Gadamer's interest in religion, and even Christianity, is not the religious message itself, but the unique way of understanding truth—"the narrative form of thought and the ritual form of language" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 127)—in which the divine has addressed mortal human beings since ancient times. The form and textuality of this address, its presuppositional reception and bindingness, provide a unique way of interpretation not only for theological/religious hermeneutics but also for a secular one. As Gadamer (1986) himself clarifies in his 1978 essay, "Aesthetic and Religious Experience," the phenomenological analysis of these

dimensions is a "secular illustration" (p. 148). Interestingly, Gadamer's interpretations of the Christian message are remarkably deep and insightful, even though he seems to have little personal interest in theology or the philosophy of religion. However, this profound analysis does not make him a theologian (cf. Oliva, 2022). In dealing with Lutheran Protestant theology and the modern believer's hermeneutic problem outlined by Bultmann, Gadamer does not claim to be doing theology. Rather, his intention is to reveal the hermeneutical value of Christian theology, thereby appropriating its concepts and themes for his philosophical hermeneutics. These theological concepts and themes correspond not only to hermeneutical problems of the text, such as reading religious or literary classics or genre distinctions, but also to philosophical problems of the human condition, including finitude, mortality, and the plurality of ideas in relation to the unity of being.

It is precisely from this perspective that Gadamer reads and interprets the ancient Greek classics. He focuses not on human behaviour towards the divine, but on the human experience of existing with it. Thus, the epic poems, conveying stories of ancestors who knew how to speak of distant gods, pre-Socratic thought that transcended the epics' anthropomorphic and everchanging gods to describe a unified being, and the Socratic dialogues, which offer a purified view of both the divine and immortality of the soul, all show different aspects of understanding divinity before it was infected by ontotheology. A key point of this chapter is that when it comes to religion, Gadamer is more concerned with the question of divinity that illuminates the hermeneutical situation—that is, with the religious dimension regarding the human life of being affected by the experience of limit and finitude. Both ancient poetry, inceptual thinking, and religious texts capture this dimension, offering different ways of relating to the divine. Therefore, for Gadamer, reading these Western classics is not just an intellectual exercise, but an opening for us to understand the connection between the present reader and the divine—i.e., what transcends us, the unbounded. My first step in exploring this possibility will be to examine Gadamer's intersections with another important figure in 20<sup>th</sup>-century hermeneutics, Rudolf Bultmann. By analyzing their interactions—one a theologian, the other a philosopher—and their disagreements in hermeneutical understanding, I will explore Gadamer's interpretation of the significance and value of the Christian message in effective history.

# 2. Gadamer and Theology

The relationship between Gadamer and Bultmann began in the intellectual milieu of Marburg, further solidified by their shared influence from Martin Heidegger's philosophy. Their vehement debates on how to read classical texts methodologically broadened the scope of hermeneutics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. No longer narrowly limited to theology and biblical interpretation, hermeneutics became the common language for all disciplines that study texts, such as philosophy, history, and literature. Despite their differences as a religious theologian and a secular philosopher, Bultmann and Gadamer, both outstanding readers of classics, engaged in a remarkable dialogue. They not only theorized about better ways to read great works from both Western and Eastern traditions, but through careful listening to each other's reading styles and questions, they also created the possibility of a transdisciplinary hermeneutics. Here, the theologian might turn to philosophy, the philosopher to poetry, the literary theorist to history, and the art historian to sacred texts. Therefore, I will use the concept of the classical as a theme that persisted throughout Gadamer's life of thought. Through a slow and careful examination, I will explain how this theme transitioned between different dimensions in his work.

In his autobiographical work *Philosophical Apprenticeship* (1985a), Gadamer describes his shared intellectual world with Bultmann. Gadamer, in the chapter devoted to Bultmann, says the following words that also summarise his *own* world of thought: "Along with a consistent daily routine of reading, which cultivated both classical and modern literature, there belonged his imaginary travels to the far reaches of the world" (p. 57). Interestingly, Gadamer's studies

in classics and philology in Breslau, where he went to study classics and philology, further exemplified this shared focus. There, beyond Western classics, he delved into Eastern traditions, learning the Quran from Franz Praetorius and Sanskrit from Otto Schrader. Reading groups became a platform for this exploration: he read Thomas Mann and Kierkegaard in groups led mostly by women, classical poetry with Kühnemann's circle, and Tagore at Natorp's house (Gadamer, 1985a, pp. 3–5; Grondin, 2003a, pp. 58, 60–61). These shared interests led Gadamer, originally from Marburg, to return there to study philosophy. For Gadamer (1985a), at that time working on Plato together with neo-Kantians such as Paul Natorp, Nicolai Hartmann and Heinz Heimsoeth, Marburg also meant the Marburg School of Theology (p. 7), which was identified with Bultmann, who had already begun to make a name for himself with his New Testament studies. Notably, Bultmann's book Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition introduced a philological and hermeneutical method applicable not just to scriptures but also to literature and ancient Greek classics (Gadamer, 1985a, p. 57). Gadamer (1997) admired Bultmann's humanism (p. 526) and also adopted the academic style of the theologian: "His pedagogic charisma was inseparable from the productivity of his research, and especially from his untiring, probing energy and his concentrated earnestness" (Gadamer, 1985a, p. 56).

For Gadamer, the years as a student of Martin Heidegger (1923–28) were also a period of intense concentration on Heidegger's philosophy, along with Bultmann. Their myriad discussions spanned philosophical inquiries from Plato and Aristotle to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dilthey, and Husserl, and theological problems from Old and New Testament exegesis to Augustine and Luther. Together, they addressed early *Heideggerian* topics like the analytic of Dasein, the philosophical meaning of existence, thrownness, the structure of care, nothingness, the anticipation of death and its anxiety, temporality, and historicity. Heidegger's statement in one of Eduard Thurneysen's lectures upon arriving at Marburg directly impacted Bultmann's biblical interpretation: "the true task of theo-

logy, the task to which it had to find the way back, to seek the word that was capable of calling to faith and to preserve in faith" (Safranski, 1998, p. 134; also see. Gadamer, 1994a, p. 155). Gadamer (1994a) in the memorial address on Heidegger also confirms this: "He also never found an answer to his original and constantly advancing question; namely, How can one speak of God without reducing him into an object of our knowledge?" (pp. 194–195) Applying Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and objectifying thinking to the event of Jesus and the Christian faith with respect to the difficulty of speaking of God, Bultmann (1960a) offered an existential interpretation and initiated the project of demythologization, aiming to make the Scriptures accessible to the contemporary reader (see also Gadamer, 2007a, p. 38). In an autobiographical work, Bultmann (1960b) describes the adaptation of this philosophy as follows:

I have endeavored throughout my entire work to carry further the tradition of historical-critical research as it was practiced by the "liberal" theology and to make our more recent theological knowledge fruitful for it. In doing so, the work of existential philosophy, which I came to know through my discussion with Martin Heidegger, has become of decisive significance for me. I found in it the conceptuality in which it is possible to speak adequately of human existence and therefore also of the existence of the believer. (p. 288)

But there is something deeper that intellectually exposes the close relationship between these two thinkers: Bultmann's reappropriation of the New Testament and reconstruction of Jesus as a testament of faith, not a historical figure, resonate with Heidegger's reading of classical texts. In the 1920s, Heidegger employed phenomenological interpretations to revive the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine. Later, in the 1940s, he *demythologized* the fragments and poems of Anaximandros, Parmenides, and Heraclitus. As Gadamer (2022) notes, "What Heidegger undertook was this: to establish Aristotle as a kind of counterpart to his own questions and precisely with the aim of coming to grips with his own questions...

In this way, Aristotle became, all of a sudden, a contemporary" (pp. 167–168). In a similar fashion, Gadamer observed that making the New Testament relevant to every reader's own thinking became the *motto* of the Marburg School of Theology (p. 165).

During their years in Marburg, Gadamer's interests leaned more towards philosophy, art, and classical philology, leading him to forgo Bultmann's lectures on theology and exegesis. However, a pivotal moment in their relationship came with Bultmann's invitation to a private reading group called *Graeca*. Held every Thursday evening, these meetings offered Gadamer the perfect blend of his passions: reading and interpreting ancient Greek classics, including religious texts. Discussions continued over wine and cigars, fostering a more intimate dialogue (Grondin, 2003a, pp. 22, 119–120). For fifteen years, Gadamer found value in Graeca beyond just the material that appealed to his interests. Bultmann's support of his views on classical textual hermeneutics provided Gadamer with confidence in his own thinking, especially in contrast to Heidegger's later philosophical development which caused tension between them (Grondin, 2002, p. 124). This new-found confidence is further evidenced by a letter Gadamer wrote to Bultmann on September 8, 1961, where he even compared his philosophy to Bultmann's theological work:

In my book I have tried to explain the fact that historical consciousness—entirely in my own field of experience, the experience of the philosophical classics, of art, and of the humanistic tradition—is permeated with a claim required by the content, which it seems to me is something that corresponds exactly to the situation of theology in recent decades, especially with regard to your own theological work. (cited in Grondin, 2003a, p. 279)

This relationship undoubtedly led Gadamer to be somewhat interested in religious and theological problems. More importantly, it helped him recognize the *importance* of such problems belonging to the philosophical tradition: the historicality of interpretation of the scriptures in Lutheran Protestant theology and the modern

reader's hermeneutic problem. Here, the Christian message delivers a different aspect to human understanding and linguisticality, prompting reflective thinking about what exceeds historically-affected consciousness and the conditions of human finitude in the face of the unity and infinity of the divine. This newfound interest is reflected in Gadamer's writings, which explore a range of religious and theological topics: the various meanings of religion and religiosity in ancient Greek culture and thought, the hermeneutical reception of the divine, the immortality of the soul in Plato's dialogues, the Christian theology of Plotinus, Augustine and Aquinas, Kant's ideas on God, Heidegger's later occupation with the inceptual thinking and the last God, the place of religion and myth in the age of science and reason, the difference between the religious word of revealed books and the poetic word of legends and myths, and the intersections of aesthetic and religious experience.

Despite years of interaction in Marburg, the textual evidence of Bultmann's direct influence on Gadamer's hermeneutics might seem limited. For instance, attributing Gadamer's hermeneutical ideas solely to Bultmann's 1950 essay "The Problem of Hermeneutics" appears unlikely (Grondin, 2003a, p. 278; 2003b, p. 158n27). Though this essay addressed the hermeneutical problem beyond the New Testament, the seeds of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics were already sown. This influence came from multiple sources: the Lutheran tradition of biblical interpretation, his participation in Heidegger's Ontology 1923 lecture on "The Hermeneutics of Facticity," and their ongoing intellectual exchange. While Gadamer only wrote one direct text on Bultmann's hermeneutics ("On the Problem of Self-Understanding"), other works can be linked to Bultmann. His autobiographical book Philosophical Apprenticeship and the article "Martin Heidegger and the Marburg Theology," written for the festschrift for Bultmann's 80th birthday address the Marburg School's connection to Heidegger, though the latter focuses more on Heidegger himself. A more systematic critique of Bultmann appears in Gadamer's Truth and Method and later essays such as "Hermeneutics and Historicism" and "Classical

and Philosophical Hermeneutics." However, even here, Bultmann is not the central theme. Finally, Gadamer's autobiographical essay "Reflections of My Philosophical Journey" acknowledges their correspondence and Bultmann's influence on his hermeneutics. In essence, while the textual evidence might appear limited, Gadamer's intellectual journey was shaped by various influences, including Bultmann's work.

Despite their differences in discipline, the intellectual connection and interaction between Bultmann and Gadamer is undeniable. Thanks to their ongoing relationship, Gadamer not only brought the hermeneutic problem (which Bultmann saw as specific to faith) into the realm of philosophy, but also discovered the hermeneutical merits of Christian theology. Perhaps the most telling reflection of their relationship is the titling of their major works. After Bultmann published his four-volume collection "Faith and Understanding," Gadamer titled his influential 1960 work "Understanding and Happening" (later published as Truth and Method) (Grondin, 2002, p. 121; 2003b, p. 13). This similarity goes beyond the surface: both titles (despite differing receptions) reflect their shared influence from Heideggerian philosophy. Both Bultmann and Gadamer accepted Heidegger's critique of objectifying thought. They agreed that Being reveals itself linguistically only to humans, and that Dasein's understanding is ultimately an understanding of its own existence. Consequently, human experience cannot be fixed, controlled, or observed as an object; it is historical, linguistic, everchanging, and faces an open future. Bultmann (1961) applied this critique to belief and understanding (pp. 22– 32), while Gadamer (2013) applied it to understanding and application (pp. 302-310). Their goal was not an objective explanation of lived experience (religious or everyday), but an existential interpretation relevant to the reader. As Gadamer (1985a) reflects in Philosophical Apprenticeship, for Bultmann, faith is an appropriation of prophecy—applying the word of God personally, translating the divine message (keryama) into one's own language. With academic integrity and rigorous reasoning, Bultmann aimed to articulate this hermeneutical endeavor, where the believer actively makes the religious message speak to themself (p. 58). Similarly, Gadamer (2013) sees the reader's understanding as an appropriation of the text's meaning, applied anew in each reading and encounter (pp. 319–320).

One of the first merits Gadamer borrows from Christian theology is Sachkritik, which brings the past text into the present situation and enables preaching to resonate with the here and now of the reader/believer. Gadamer does not shop here and takes this as a model for reading the classical texts of Western culture, such as the Greek myths and poems, the sayings of early Greek thinkers, or Socratic dialogues: as Gadamer (1986) states, "the hermeneutic art is in fact the art of understanding something that appears alien and unintelligible to us... the task is to let the text speak to us once again" (p. 141). Just as the believer finds answers in the Scriptures relevant to their everyday problems, Gadamer suggests a practical way of appropriating the classical questions of eminent texts (e.g., Greek myths, sayings of early Greek thinkers) to the reader's concrete situation. These enduring questions about death, living a good life, and so on, preoccupy human beings regardless of time and place (Lawrence, 2002, p. 169; Vessey, 2010, p. 650). Bultmann's hermeneutical task was to find meaning in one's own life through faith. Gadamer, on the other hand, transfers this Christian value of reaching the message within the text's shell to his own philosophical hermeneutics. Here, he employs the logic of question and answer proposed earlier by R.G. Collingwood, a figure who also interested Bultmann. Building on Collingwood's idea that statements answer questions, Gadamer (1984) argues that each text offers an answer to a question waiting to be revealed. However, the true hermeneutical effort does not stop at uncovering the question. The reader is motivated to pose the question to themselves (p. 106; also see. Gadamer, 2013, pp. 378–387). By moving back and forth between the whole text and individual sentences, paragraphs, and fragments, the reader ventures on a historical journey. This is a never-ending path, traveling from the

answers presented in the text towards the underlying subject matter—the original question (Gadamer, 1994b, pp. 44–46). In this way, according to both Bultmann and Gadamer, the temporal distance between the answer (text) and the question (message) becomes the locus of hermeneutics, creating the possibility for understanding. In conclusion, understanding a text is not about capturing an objective meaning. As Gadamer elaborates in his essay on Bultmann (Gadamer, 1977), it is the reader's self-understanding—the process of concretizing their own historical existence.

We previously mentioned Bultmann and Gadamer's shared humanism focused on classical texts. However, this very interest, later criticized by Heidegger (1992), surprisingly becomes a point of divergence between them on crucial matters. These interpreters of classics disagree on the status of scripture, particularly the New Testament: Bultmann (1989) sees no clear distinction between scripture and other literary genres subject to hermeneutics, arguing for the application of Schleiermacherian and Dilthean hermeneutics to theology (Grondin, 2002, pp. 135–137). Gadamer, however, disapproves of Bultmann's secular approach, which seemingly equates holy scriptures with ordinary literary texts. He even jokingly remarked to Fred Lawrence (2002), "Bultmann forgets that the books of the New Testament are not books in the ordinary sense of the term" (p. 190). According to Gadamer (1977), scriptures based on revelation differ from other books or religious texts. He terms them "origin-texts" (Urliteratur) lacking a traditional mens auctoris. Instead, their authors declare a testimony of faith in an event exceeding their own comprehension (p. 210). Therefore, the authorial intention should not limit the reader's understanding. Gadamer argues that reading them solely to grasp the intention of their writers, rather than their faith testimony leading to individual salvation, diminishes their significance and fails to do justice to the original text as an object of faith.

This distinction between religious texts and poetic works is crucial for Gadamer. He argues that failing to differentiate them overlooks the fundamental difference between the poetic word of myths and legends and the unique character of the word in revealed religions. In Gadamer's view, Bultmann's secular reading of the New Testament as classical literature is a hermeneutical injustice (Gadamer, 2013, p. 340; 1986, pp. 140, 147, 151–152): understanding a text presupposes the reader's existing relationship with the subject matter. However, for a believer reading a religious text, this relationship is rooted in *faith*, not universal truths. A believer's presupposition becomes an assertion of faith, shaping their interpretation differently from a non-believer or someone unfamiliar with scripture. In short, Bultmann, the theologian, surprisingly treats Christian scripture as literary works that create symbols. Gadamer, the philosopher, distinguishes between sacred and profane texts based on the reader's prior understanding. For Gadamer, belief in the sacredness of the text transforms its status. The religious message (kerygma) acts as a sign for the believer who has already accepted it. This recognition of different text types led Gadamer to develop his earlier ideas on "the example of classical works" (discussed in Truth and Method under the section of "Prejudices as Conditions of Understanding"). In his accounts of the "eminent text," he first distinguished literary, legal, and religious texts based on their forms of expression and binding nature (Gadamer, 1986; 1980). He then added a second distinction based on the character of speech in Western culture: the questioning word asserted by scientific and philosophical inquiry, the word of legend and wisdom expressed in poetry, and the word of reconciliation and the promise proclaimed by the word of religious texts (Gadamer, 1998a). These distinctions highlight the peculiarity of the religious word, and here again, Gadamer underscores the hermeneutical value of Christian theology.

Finally, Gadamer (2013) emphasizes in Part III of *Truth and Method* that Christian theology introduces a new category with its doctrine of *verbum Dei*. This concept holds a unique place in the history of Western thought regarding the metaphysical accounts of the nature of language that has permeated from Ancient Greece to modern philosophy and even to our everyday understanding

of language today (pp. 423-455: "The Development of the Concept of Language in the History of Western Thought"). Western metaphysics has traditionally separated words and things, which were previously considered one. It has also sought various ways to reconcile them. Early in philosophy, Plato aimed to refute the Sophists' claim that knowing a thing's name grants possession of the thing itself. He concluded that a thing's essence lies not in the word but in the *logos* (i.e., ultimately in numbers), which ensures unity and universality. In this way, a word's truth is revealed through pure rationality, not through natural imitation or arbitrary convention. This also meant a shift from the naming words used by Hesiod or Homer and the poetic word of Parmenides saying the One, towards the rationalized word of philosophy. This move, however, deprived language of its inherent power. Western metaphysics not only obscured the ontological relationship between words and things but also turned language into a mere instrument of thinking (van der Heiden, 2022, p. 227).

For Gadamer, a beacon shines through this history of obscurity: the doctrine of the inner word, developed by the Stoics and medieval Christian theologians (see Arthos, 2009). In their interpretation of the Trinity, the incarnate Christ (i.e., the outer word) reveals the inner word ever-present in the world (see Lawrence, p. 190). Put another way, Jesus' embodiment does not add something external to God's unity; rather, it completes the inner word permeating all created things in the world. Two paramount conclusions emerge: similar to how Greek thinking challenged their culture's anthropomorphic gods, Christian theologians reject an anthropomorphic Christ. Additionally, the word and the thing, separated by Greek philosophers, reunite in Christian faith. Unlike Greek gods, the God of Christianity retains divinity through incarnation: Jesus is both the Word of God and His Son, with every moment of his life an instance of the Word becoming flesh. In the most theoretical part of Truth and Method, Gadamer emphasizes the value of Christian theology: he sees God's dynamic self-relationality as a model for the unity of thought and speech in language (see Oliva, 2022, pp. 359, 362). This is what draws Gadamer's hermeneutics to this Christian theory of language: the spoken word is born as a product of the thinking process, just as the Word of God is not an inferior copy or subsidiary sign of God himself. The divine intellect's internal relation (ratio) to itself (verbum) manifests as a perpetual dialogue of thought (soul) with itself (speech). In this way, the truth of a word is evident in the unity of thought and speech, completing the logos of thinking: when we say something that makes sense to someone who listens to us, this also means that we find true words that are heard and do not make empty and meaningless sounds (see. van der Heiden, 2022, p. 232).

In the Christian belief system, God's descent to Earth and sacrifice for humanity honours human existence. The gospels bear witness to this paradoxical yet revered unity—a concept unintelligible in either ancient Greek thought and poetry or modern philosophy and literature. Therefore, they deserve recognition as a genre distinct from mere literary texts, as theologian Bultmann suggests. However, Gadamer's intent is not to theologize philosophy through religious doctrine. Instead, he appropriates for philosophy the hermeneutical merits of theological concepts (see. Gadamer, 1994a, p. 180). These concepts, elucidated by Stoic and medieval Christian theologians, restored the dignity of language.

# 3. The Question Concerning the Divine

Gadamer's philosophy of language is informed by the concept of unity between word and thing in Christian theology. This concept also serves as a springboard for understanding his philosophy of religion. From the ancient Greeks to poets like Hölderlin and Celan, this unity finds its *truest* expression in poetry (see. Gadamer, 2007c, pp. 212–214). For Gadamer, the theogony of Hesiod and the epic poems of Homer, which gave written form to Greek myths and oral traditions, do not simply represent a stepping stone towards more sophisticated *logos* with the rise of philosophy. He explicitly rejects the narrative of a sharp shift from *mythos* to *logos* in Ancient Greece, as well as the stark opposition between them that emerged during

the Enlightenment (Gadamer, 1986, p. 63; also see. 1998b, p. 36). This is precisely why he criticizes Bultmann's project of demythologization. Bultmann saw myths and mythological thinking as the complete opposite of scientific reasoning (Gadamer, 1977, pp. 51– 52; Schalow, 2001, p. 140). Demythologization attempts to answer a crucial question: how can modern believers, living in a world dominated by science, reconcile their faith with a religious text filled with mythological elements and miracles? The challenge for a devout Christian lies in demythologizing the New Testament and integrating it with their scientific worldview, all while maintaining their faith in a text that describes the unexplainable divine. Bultmann's approach suggests that mythological elements in the New Testament prejudice the message of the gospels, making them seem unscientific. Gadamer (2007a), however, considers this attempt to resolve the incompatibility between the New Testament and the modern world to be "extremely one-sided" (p. 54) and overly reliant on a scientific worldview that should not limit hermeneutical principles (Gadamer, 1988, p. 87n11; cf. 1994a, pp. 182-183).

Scientifically purifying sacred texts and myths, which we now mainly approach as literature, does violence to them. This approach assumes mythos is only valid within the boundaries of logos. Gadamer, however, argues for appreciating myths on their own terms. He demonstrates how logos can illuminate the truth claims of *mythos*. In creation myths and epic hero journeys, poets convey the names and attributes of the gods. These namings are not just labels; they are pronouncements—they say something (Gadamer, 1986, p. 144; 2007b, p. 147). For instance, Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, is a fitting name because it derives from the Greek word for remembrance. Thus, Hesiod's poetic transmission (Überlieferung) is not just a record of stories about gods and humanity's creation. It is the continuation of a culture where the divine is experienced through the meaning of these names within the narrative's logic (Gadamer, 1986, pp. 143–144; 1985b, p. 60). The *Theogony*, when actively read, becomes an eminent text that stands on its own. Passed down through generations and cultures, Hesiod's telling of Greek mythology transforms from traditional ritualistic stories into a literary work that conveys the unity of word and thing to readers worldwide (Gadamer, 1986, p. 154). The thing (*Sache*) denoted by the word (*logos*) of the *mythos* can now reflect the reader's own situation. The poetic word captures each reader by reminding them of their mortality in the face of immortals. Reading poetry thus becomes an act of harvesting meaning—the reader enacts the unity of word and thing (Gadamer, 2007c, pp. 217–218).

By reading/interpreting this inceptual understanding of divinity, untainted by later ontotheology, Gadamer seeks a non-metaphysical experience of Being. He follows Heidegger's call to "think with the Greeks... in a more original way" (Gadamer, 1994a, p. 145). This concept of divinity as the unity of Being, where mythos and logos are inseparable and word and thing remain one, aligns with a classical understanding of religion. This understanding has roots in the mythopoeic works of ancient Greece, the wisdom sayings of pre-Socratics like Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus, and even Plato's dialogues. For Gadamer, this pre-metaphysical understanding of divinity offers a valuable counterpoint in the history of Western thought (p. 158). Unlike revealed religions with their institutional authority over scripture, it does not require faith as a precondition for understanding. This perspective is evident throughout these classical texts as a counterimage in the history of Western thought (Gadamer, 1994a, p. 158; also see. 2016, pp. 217-218).

So what is divinity for Gadamer? What does the divine refer to? Gadamer (2013) is open to any wisdom that engages with this fundamental, classical human question, one that transcends "the vicissitudes of changing times and changing tastes" (p. 299). This question, passed down through various traditions, constantly demands an answer but never reaches a definitive conclusion. It also forms the foundation of Gadamer's classical philosophy of religion: in simpler terms, what remains constant amidst change, what always holds itself, what is immortal and everlasting—

these qualities evoke the divine that underlies all religions. For example, early Greek thinkers, particularly Parmenides, stripped away the explicit anthropomorphism from religious narratives and vocabulary (Gadamer, 1999, p. 46). They used the divine to designate the totality and unchanging order of being. Hence, the divine is no longer a human-shaped representation of something beyond humanity; instead, it becomes the attribute of the One, which is both closest to humans and yet always transcendent (Gadamer, 1999, pp. 38–40). We see a similar concept in Greek society, where Socrates was accused of impiety. Here, the divine was defined by its incomprehensible distance. Socrates, however, with a pious awe acknowledging his own limitations, entrusted the divine to his daily life experiences as well as his moral and social responsibilities (Gadamer, 1985b, pp. 72–73). Even medieval thinkers like Augustine and Cusanus, who rejected traditional anthropomorphism in the Christian faith while explaining the unity in the trinity and the coincidence of opposites, arrived at a similar understanding of the divine.

On the other hand, the divine can also refer to a fundamental human experience in this world: mortality. The emphasis on the immortality of gods in theogonies, cosmogonies, myths, and religious texts can be seen as a reflection on human finitude. Parmenides' poem exemplifies this connection. Through a goddess, he tells us that everything born will eventually die. Yet, mortals disregard this word of truth, ignoring it while awake and forgetting it in their sleep. Being towards death is essentially an experience that compels us to consider the divine, the immortal, the imperishable form of being. However, it also grounds us in the absolute reality of our finitude. Undoubtedly, a core truth of religions that address this theme is that they confront humans with their mortality in relation to the unity of this unchanging being. This transcendent truth serves a dual purpose: reminding us of our own being-toward-death and alleviating the fear of nothingness by offering ideas of the afterlife and salvation. This recurring theme of human finitude and the divine is something Gadamer himself grappled with throughout his work. From his early writings to his later discussions with philosophers like Vattimo and Derrida, Gadamer's hermeneutics is not concerned with providing answers but rather fostering questions. He approaches this classical question—i.e., the absoluteness of human finitude and the divine—from an aesthetic perspective, rather than a religious or theological one.

I appreciate Gadamer's interpretation of the divine and his philosophy of religion as an aesthetic approach. By reading the classics and appropriating their questions into his own thinking, Gadamer becomes neither a religious thinker nor a theologian. Instead, he emerges as an exponent of the experience of truth about human limitations. Therefore, for Gadamer, the Phaedo is neither a questioning word asserted by scientific or philosophical inquiry, nor is the New Testament a promise of salvation because he does not meet the condition of faith. On the contrary, he reads these texts as literary works—alongside works like Homer's epic poems, Heraclitus' fragments, or the poetry of Dante, Goethe, and Hölderlin—that remind us of the truth about humanity and the divine. Reading these works becomes a contemplative experience for Gadamer, a way to harvest insights on living with the concept of the divine. Gadamer (1985b) discovers a common thread not only in Christian doctrine but also in the religiosity of Socrates: "act of veneration toward the divine and evidence of a pious awe" (p. 72). In encountering these classics, the reader acknowledges their own limitations.

In this respect, Gadamer does not advocate for a fundamentalist return to traditional or metaphysical religion, but for an aesthetic appreciation of the truth that points towards the divine—a way to experience religion in the postmodern age. While Gadamer (1999) suggests humanity might not need religion in its conventional form, and that religions may have lost their meaning (p. 119), he believes we cannot escape the truth the divine evokes: our own mortality (Gadamer, 1998c, pp. 205–207). Therefore, the question of religion in the *classical* sense for Gadamer goes beyond adhering to a specific tradition (e.g., Ancient Greek or Western Judeo-Christian). He emphasizes listening to and learning from the religions of other cultures and civilizations—Chinese, Indian, Islamic traditions, for instance. Reading their classics allows us to understand how these religions approach the world, grapple with death, life, human rights, art, and societal structures (Gadamer, 1998c, pp. 203, 205). For that matter, Gadamer critiques the participants at a Capri meeting where only *certain* religions were represented. He argues:

The participants in this discussion, above all the principal speakers, Vattimo and Derrida, have sought to engage with the problem of religion as it is encountered in the context of European Enlightenment and from the perspective of our European culture. However, if the undogmatic concern with religious experience which has governed this discussion is to be thought through from a global perspective, it should be possible and indeed necessary to extend this problematic to include other world religions. Whenever it is a question of experience, we should always begin from where we are. None the less, even a cursory glance at the other world religions show us that there is one thing which seems never to be holy absent. Namely, the ubiquitous knowledge of one's own death and at the same time the impossibility of the actual experience of death. This is the exemplary characteristic of what is to be human. The knowledge of one's own limit or end is something which no other living creature possesses. (p. 205; my italics)

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Gadamer's concept of the divine transcends specific religions and theological arguments. It centers on the fundamental human experience of finitude, a theme explored across various cultures through classical texts. By engaging with these texts aesthetically, we gain a deeper understanding of our limitations and the concept of the absolute. While acknowledging the potential decline of traditional religion, Gadamer does not advocate for its abandonment. Instead, he proposes an aesthetic appreciation of the divine, a

way to confront mortality and contemplate the enduring questions about humanity and our place in the world. This approach fosters a sense of awe and encourages an openness to the wisdom of diverse religious traditions, ultimately enriching our overall understanding of the divine.

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# QUINTA SECCIÓN FIFTH PART

GADAMER Y LOS CLÁSICOS
GADAMER AND THE CLASSICS

# CAPÍTULO XII / CHAPTER XII

# THE PROBLEM OF EXPERIENCE AND THE AMBIVALENT STATUS OF ARISTOTLE IN WAHRHEIT UND METHODE

Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire

#### RESUMEN

Este capítulo examina el estatus ambivalente de la figura de Aristóteles en el opus magnum de Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode (1960). Explora el contraste entre la entusiasta apropiación que hace Gadamer de la filosofía práctica de Aristóteles en la sección del libro dedicada a la cuestión de la aplicación (Anwendung) como problema central de la hermenéutica y su crítica a la comprensión aristotélica de la experiencia. Sostengo que la crítica de Gadamer a las perspectivas de Aristóteles sobre la ἐμπειρία como cercenando el carácter esencialmente negativo de la experiencia no solo es apresurada sino en última instancia problemática para el proyecto más amplio de su apropiación de la ética aristotélica. Al mostrar cómo una dimensión acumulativa y "positiva" de la experiencia está inevitablemente en juego en la comprensión aristotélica de la sabiduría práctica, sostengo que la hermenéutica gadameriana

podría haberse beneficiado de una apropiación más integral u holística de la filosofía de Aristóteles que la que Gadamer propone en su obra principal.

Palabras clave: Aristóteles, Gadamer, Experiencia, Phronesis, Hermenéutica.

### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter examines the ambivalent status of the figure of Aristotle in Hans-Georg Gadamer's opus magnum, Wahrheit und Methode (1960). It explores the contrast between Gadamer's enthusiastic appropriation of Aristotle's practical philosophy in the section of the book devoted to the question of application (Anwendung) as the central problem of hermeneutics and his criticism of Aristotle's understanding of experience. I argue that Gadamer's critique of Aristotle's views on ἐμπειρία as short-circuiting the essentially negative character of experience is not only hasty but ultimately problematic for the broader project of his appropriation of Aristotleian ethics. Showing how a cumulative and "positive" dimension of experience is inevitably at play in Aristotle's understanding of practical wisdom, I contend that Gadamerian hermeneutics could have benefitted from a more integral or holistic appropriation of Aristotle's philosophy than the one Gadamer proposes in his major work.

Keywords: Aristotle, Gadamer, Experience, Phronesis, Hermeneutics.

#### 1. Introduction

The role Aristotelian philosophy plays in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics could hardly be overstated. In fact, in the section of Wahrheit und Methode devoted to the "relevance (Aktualität) of Aristotle," Gadamer states plainly that Aristotle's analysis of moral knowledge offers a "model of the problems pertaining to the task of hermeneutics (Modell in der hermeneutischen Aufgabe gelegenen Probleme)"

(GW 1, p. 329; emphasis in the original). Why is that so? The fundamental problem of hermeneutics (hermeneutische Grundproblem), the central problem of hermeneutics as such (das Zentrale Problem der Hermeneutik überhaupt), we are told, is the problem of application (Anwendung) (GW 1, p. 312). The problem of application is central to hermeneutics because in each of its attempts to understand, interpretation must apply the meaning of the interpretandum to the "concrete situation" of the interpretans. This implies that interpretation is an infinite task, in the sense of an always ongoing and always renewed attempt to apply the emerging meaning to the various concrete, historical situations, such that no interpretation will ever be a definitive one. Because hermeneutic understanding is always applicative, truth hermeneutically understood has the character of an event (*Ereignischarakter*)<sup>1</sup>. Inherent to this picture is the plurality of legitimate and productive interpretations of one same interpetandum, and, as such, philosophical hermeneutics reflects the One-Many structure of being wondered at and examined by Plato and Aristotle, and about which Gadamer himself wrote a lot<sup>2</sup>. It is one specific version of the problem of the One and the Many that is especially salient here:

If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that one and the same tradition must time and again be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, concerns the relationship between the universal and the particular. Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation. This makes *Aristotelian ethics* especially important for us (TM, p. 322/ GW 1, p. 317)

Aristotle's ethics is a model because it conceptualizes a kind of knowledge –  $\varphi \rho \acute{o} v \eta \sigma \iota \varsigma$ , practical wisdom – that, unlike theoretical

<sup>1</sup> TM (p. 500). We should recall here that the first projected title of Wahheit und Methode was Verstehen und Geschehen. For a study of the event-character of hermeneutic understanding, see DaVia and Lynch 2024.

<sup>2</sup> On the topic of the One and Many in Gadamer, see esp. Grondin 1994 (pp. 29–38), Renaud 1999 (pp. 69–86), Gibson 2016, and my Pageau-St-Hilaire 2024 (esp. 222-226).

knowledge, is concerned with the particular, and specifically with figuring out the best among various possible ways to concretize something universal in the specific context of one's life. Because it must both take into account the concrete situations of one's actions and because the results of such knowing are actions that will have effects in the world, φρόνησις is thoroughly animated by change and becoming: "what interests us here is precisely that he [Aristotle] is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming (von einem gewordenen Sein), but determined by it and determinative of it" (TM, p. 322/ GW 1, p. 317). In a nutshell, the compelling character of Aristotle's practical rationality resides for Gadamer in the fact that it embraces concrete particularity, becoming, and change without forsaking reason (Vernunft). It appears to him as a model for hermeneutic understanding insofar as hermeneutics too must accept the historicity of interpretation (as the application of meaning to one's particular, contingent situation) without falling prey to some kind of relativistic anti-rationalism wherein no room is left for something like *sound* understanding and good interpretations.

From the alleged anti-intellectualism of Aristotle's practical philosophy (built in the critique of Socrates and Plato on the Good), Gadamer deduces somewhat hastily another feature of the Aristotelian model: Aristotle, Gadamer contends, is the "founder of ethics as a discipline *independent of metaphysics*" (TM, pp. 322–323; GW 1, p. 317). The appeal of this putative independence of ethics from metaphysics in Aristotle, it seems, is that it parallels the autonomy of the *Geisteswissenschaften vis-à-vis* modern natural sciences. After all, Gadamer is eager to call what is often translated as humanities and social sciences "moral sciences (*moralische Wissenschaften*)" (GW 1, 319). The analogy would be something like this:

#### 2. Geisteswissenschaften: Naturwissenschaften:: Ethics: Metaphysics

To be sure, Gadamer's point is not that Aristotelian metaphysics is like modern natural sciences. The analogy rather concerns the respective independence of the terms and is meant to express that ethics is autonomous and not supervened by or grounded in metaphysics just like the humanities and social sciences are autonomous and are not supervened by or grounded in natural sciences. Thus, for Aristotelian practical philosophy to truly work as a model for the hermeneutic understanding at work in the *Geisteswissenchaften*, it must be autonomous, that is, independent from metaphysics. This is, of course, a complex and contentious claim. Part of what I propose in the foregoing chapter is a critical examination of that claim.

In a strict sense, Gadamer is right that Aristotle's ethics does not depend on his metaphysics, for the φρόνιμος need not engage in the study of being qua being. However, the analogy sketched above suggests that Gadamer means a bit more than this. In fact, the independence that is at issue in the contrast between the Geisteswissenchaften and the Naturwissenschaften is a methodological autonomy: human and social sciences should not depend on the method employed in modern natural science, and were the former to look at the latter as a methodological model, the Geisteswissenschaften would forsake their own specific character<sup>3</sup>. But is it clear that ethics is methodologically independent from metaphysics for Aristotle? Surely, he says in the Nicomachean Ethics that we should not expect the same precision in ethical matters as in scientific matters, and practical philosophy can only hope to "show the truth roughly and in outline (παχυλῶς καὶ τύπω)" (NE I 3 1094b19)<sup>4</sup>. However, this is different from claiming a methodological independence, for practical philosophy could very well be modelled on theoretical philosophy while acknowledging its lack of precision compared to its model. Prima facie, there is at least one significant hint in Aristotle's texts that this could be the case: the analysis of the structure of deliberation in terms of the practical syllogism sug-

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that Gadamer intends to provide a method for the Geisteswissenschaften. He rather hopes to free them from the methodological paradigm. On Gadamer not being involved in (and rather circumventing) the Methodenstreit between the Geisteswissenschaften and Naturwissenschaften, see Mariafioti 2022 (p. 75).

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, citations from the Nicomachean Ethics follow Reeve's 2014 translation with occasional modifications.

gests a parallelism between theoretical and practical wisdom, and indeed a kind of imprecise imitation of the former by the latter. This is not to deny the important structural differences between  $\sigma o \phi (\alpha)$  and  $\phi \rho o v \eta \sigma \iota \varsigma$ —Gadamer rightly emphasizes Aristotle's care in distinguishing these two —, but to call to attention a structural similarity that seems equally important to Aristotle. So, if we take the independence of ethics from metaphysics to mean the methodological independence of practical knowledge from theoretical knowledge<sup>5</sup>, Gadamer's analogy appears a bit harder to defend.

In the critical interpretation that follows, I will focus on another – although related – structural similarity between σοφία and φρόνησις, namely that both are importantly "empirical," that is, that they vitally rely on and are grounded in experience (ἐμπειρία). As we shall see, Gadamer acknowledges the centrality of experience in Aristotelian practical rationality, but he does not fully draw the implications of this acknowledgement. If we do so, a problem arises, for less than thirty pages after recognizing the central role of experience for φρόνησις, Gadamer sharply criticizes Aristotle's account of experience as an anti-hermeneutical analysis of Erfahrung. The only way to avoid the contradiction would be to show that the sense of experience that is relevant in practical matters is significantly different than the sense of experience at stake in Aristotle's account of inductive experience in *Posterior Analytics* II 19. However, I shall show that, on the decisive issue, they are in fact much more similar than different: for Aristotle, what is essential with experience in both theoretical and practical matters is the positive and cumulative dimension that Gadamer rejects as unfitted for hermeneutic experience. I thus argue that, in fine, the status

<sup>5</sup> The analogy would be extended thusly:

Geisteswissenschaften: Naturwissenschaften:: Ethics: Metaphysics

Geisteswissenschaften : Naturwissenschaften :: Practical rationality (φρόνησις) : Theoretical rationality (σοφία)

I believe this is not an exaggerated interpretation of what Gadamer says, for the context of this claim is Aristotle's rejection of the Socratic-Platonic intellectualist attitude to ethics whereby virtue and knowledge in the theoretical sense are inseparable.

of Aristotle in *Wahrheit und Methode* remains fundamentally ambivalent, as it oscillates between the appraisal of  $\varphi \rho \acute{o} v \eta \sigma \iota \zeta$  and the rejection of Aristotelian  $\dot{\epsilon} \mu \pi \epsilon \iota \rho \acute{\iota} \alpha$ .

In section 2, I follow Gadamer's argument that leads us from the structure of φρόνησις to the notion of experience. In section 3, I explain Gadamer's criticism of Aristotle's notion of experience. In Section 4, I show that what he rejects the most in Aristotle's account is what is precisely needed for an intellectual virtue like φρόνησις to obtain and operate. I finally suggest that Gadamer is right in appropriating φρόνησις but wrong to reject the cumulative structure of ἐμπειρία as presented by Aristotle. This is not merely a point about Gadamer's interpretation of Aristotle. More importantly, Gadamerian hermeneutics could benefit from appropriating Aristotle's account of ἐμπειρία.

#### 2. From Φρόνησις to Erfahrung

As Gadamer insists and as we have briefly discussed above, hermeneutics is applicative. Aristotelian practical wisdom ( $\phi p \acute{o} v \eta \sigma \iota \zeta$ ) too is an application of the universal to the particular, but so is another intellectual disposition that Aristotle discusses in Book VI of the Nicomachean Ethics: craft ( $\tau \acute{e} \chi v \eta$ ). It is because of this striking similarity between  $\phi p \acute{o} v \eta \sigma \iota \zeta$  and  $\tau \acute{e} \chi v \eta$  that Gadamer spends most of his chapter on Aristotle distinguishing the two. This is no mere work of classical exegesis, far from it: were  $\phi p \acute{o} v \eta \sigma \iota \zeta$  applicative in the same sense, one could hardly differentiate between the hermeneutic application and the technical kind of application at work in modern instrumental rationality.

One of the most important differences between technical and practical applications lies in the way they respectively conceive of the relation between means and ends. In moral action, unlike in  $\tau \acute{e}\chi \nu \eta$ , the means are not indifferent to the end: while "mere expediency" toward the production of the product satisfy the requirements of  $\tau \acute{e}\chi \nu \eta$ , in  $\phi \acute{e}\nu \iota \eta \iota \eta \iota$ , "the consideration of the means is itself a moral consideration" (TM, p. 331). The reason for this lies in the structure of  $\tau \acute{e}\iota \iota \iota \iota$  (action) as distinguished from  $\tau \iota \iota \iota \iota \iota$ 

(production): production is a process whose end lies entirely in the finished product, the  $\xi\rho\gamma\sigma$ , whereas human action is itself or contains in itself its own  $\tau\xi\lambda\sigma\varsigma^6$ .

Instead of discussing further the differences between φρόνησις and τέχνη, I would like to draw attention to two passages in which Gadamer touches on the role of experience in practical wisdom. The first one concerns the constitution of φρόνησις as a disposition or state (what Aristotle calls ἕξις and Gadamer translates as Haltung):

Aristotle restores the balance [between knowledge and virtue] by showing that the basis of moral knowledge in man is orexis, striving, and its development into a fixed demeanor (hexis). The very name "ethics" indicates that Aristotle bases arete on practice and "ethos."

Human civilization differs essentially from nature in that it is not simply a place where capacities and powers work themselves out; man becomes what he is through what he does and how he behaves—i.e., he behaves in a certain way because of what he has become. (TM, p. 323)

Aristotle indeed conceives of all virtues, including intellectual virtues like φρόνησις, as dispositions. As he makes clear in NE II 5, virtues are dispositions as distinguished from emotions or passions (πάθη) and capacities (δυνάμεις). Virtues are developed out of these capacities (and ὅρεξις, flagged here by Gadamer, is precisely a δύναμις). Ethical virtue thus come from practice and ἕθος, habit. We become who we are through how we behave: this is the Aristotelian insight into the role of habituation in the development of virtue. This, at least, is the case of moral or ethical virtue. In NE II 1, Aristotle claims that intellectual virtues come to be from instruction (ἐκ διδασκαλίας), which requires experience (ἐμπειρία) and time,

<sup>6</sup> See NEVI 5 1140b6-7: τῆς μὲν γὰρ ποιήσεως ἔτερον τὸ τέλος, τῆς δὲ πράξεως οὐκ ἄν εἵη: ἔστι γὰρ αὐτὴ ἡ εὐπραξία τέλος. This distinction between πρᾶξις and ποιήσις is more fundamentally the ontological difference between motion (κίνησις) and activity (ἐνέργεια), which is formulated in full in Metaphysics Θ 6 1048b18-31. For good discussions of this passage and the centrality of this distinction in Aristotelian ontology, see especially Kosman 2015 and Gonzalez 2019.

and that ethical virtues come from habit ( $\dot{\epsilon}\xi\ \check{\epsilon}\theta$ ov $\xi$ ) (1103a15–17). This means that there is no moral virtue without habit, and no practical wisdom without experience. Albeit imprecisely, Gadamer seems to acknowledge this when he highlights the role of "practice and education (Ausübung und Erziehung)" in the formation of a moral consciousness (sittliche Bewußtsein) as a disposition or Haltung (TM, p. 324), at least if we take Ausübung to refer to the kind of exercises that habituation represent.

Later in his argument, Gadamer is emphatic and most clear about the centrality of experience in practical wisdom. Because practical wisdom encompasses both means and ends,

it is pointless to distinguish here between knowledge (*Wissen*) and experience (*Erfahrung*), as can be done in the case of a techne. For moral knowledge contains a kind of experience in itself, and in fact we shall see that this is perhaps the fundamental form of experience (*grundlegende Form der Erfahrung*), compared with which all other experience represents an alienation (*Verfremdung*), not to say a denaturing (*Denaturierung*). (TM, 332; GW 1, p. 328)

In a footnote appended to this remark on this primordial sense of experience, Gadamer directs us to his analysis of hermeneutic experience as the experience of finitude, which is found some thirty-five pages further in the book (GW 1, p. 363). This reference is striking in that, instead of pointing to the beginning of his whole analysis of experience, Gadamer skips over the first eleven pages of this section (III.3) on Erfahrung (GW 1, pp. 352–362). The English translation of Wahrheit und Methode misguidedly "corrects" the reference, but the first 1960 edition of the book and subsequent German editions of the Gesammelte Werke consistently point to the same midway point in the section on experience. I think Gadamer made no mistake here; he intentionally points his reader to what he takes to be the most fundamental kind of experience, namely the hermeneutic experience as an experience of human finitude. The pages that precede that analysis in fact discuss another kind of experience. And since "all other experience" represents an alienation or a denaturing of that fundamental kind, the passages Gadamer skips concern a kind of experience whose significance is at best secondary, if not altogether problematic. The problem is that this alienated or denatured kind of experience turns out to be... *Aristotle's account of experience!* 

## 3. The Problem of Experience

There are, then, different kinds of experience, and Gadamer thinks that the experience of the  $\varphi\rho\delta\nu\mu\rho\varsigma$  is the fundamental experience of human finitude, compared to which other kinds of experience appear denatured. Yet, the discussion of Aristotle's analysis of experience ( $\dot{\epsilon}\mu\pi\epsilon\iota\rho(\alpha)$ ) shows that this inductive experience is precisely the denatured kind that Gadamer sets aside in favor of the more "fundamental" kind. Why should Aristotelian  $\dot{\epsilon}\mu\pi\epsilon\iota\rho(\alpha)$  and Aristotelian  $\phi\rho\delta\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  be at odds?

As already mentioned, the fundamental kind of experience is hermeneutic experience, whose essence is finitude: in the most authentic sense ( $im\ eigentlichen\ Sinne$ ), experience is experience of human finitude (GW 1, p. 363). This putatively hearkens back to Greek tragedy, whose "learning through suffering" ( $\pi$ άθει μάθος) is at bottom an experience of human limitations (GW 1, 362), and which, according to Aeschylus' Agamemnon, Zeus gave to mankind as a path toward knowing (τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώ,  $Aesch.\ Ag.$ , 175). Gadamer intimates some kind of lineage between this tragic φρονεῖν and Aristotle's φρόνησις<sup>7</sup>. The practically wise person is an experienced person in that she has become deeply aware of her finitude. According to Gadamer, Aristotle's account of inductive experience is in principle estranged from such finitude. Why is that so?

Posterior Analytics II 19 asks how we get to grasp the principles that allow scientific demonstrations. Aristotle's answer is that we get to these principles through induction, ἐπαγωγή. As the suffix

<sup>7</sup> Aubenque 2014 [1963] (pp. 155–177) also sees tragedy and Aristotle's φρόνησις as closely intertwined.

άγωγή suggests, induction is a path. Along this path, there are several milestones. First, there is perception. Second, there is the retention (μονή) of perceptions in memory (μνήμη). Third, these memories produce together one experience (ἐμπειρία μία). From this experience finally comes to rest in the soul a universal (ἡρεμήσαντος τοῦ καθόλου ἐν τῆ ψυχῆ) of which we have a noetic perception (APo II 19 99b36-100a7 cf. 100b12)8. Aristotle's famous image to describe the process of ἐπαγωγή is that of a fleeing army that, in a rout, reforms one soldier after another and finally stands still (100a12-13). The key feature of this image, at least for Gadamer, is the progression, step by step, one after the other, from many to one and from a messy movement to an ordered rest. According to him, however, this picture is too ideal and does not reflect accurately what happens in genuine experience 9. Consider the following critical remarks:

Aristotle's image of the fleeing army is imperfect because it starts from a wrong assumption (eine schiefe Voraussetzung), namely that before fleeing the army was standing fast. [...]

But if, like Aristotle, we think of the essence of experience (Wesen der Erfahrung) only in regard to "science" [which in any case is not 'modern' science (Wissenschaft) but 'knowledge' (Wissen)], then we are simplifying the process by which it comes about. His image describes the process, but it describes it under oversimplified conditions (vereinfachenden Voraussetzungen). As though the typical experience would emerge of its own without any contradiction! (Als ob sich die Typik der Erfahrung widerspruchslos von selbst ergäbe!)! [...]

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle offers a similar account in Metaphysics A 980b25-981a7.

It is important to acknowledge that elsewhere, Gadamer commented much more positively on the fleeing army image – see GW 2 (pp. 112, 149, 200, 228–229); GW 7 (p. 242); GW 8 (p. 354). When Gadamer there appropriates the image instead of critiquing it, it usually is to account for the mysterious process of language acquisition (an idea he borrows from Themistius' reading). This is to say that the positive treatments of the same passage do not actually challenge the criticism he deploys in Wahrheit und Methode. This is not a contradiction: one can think that the same image is helpful for thinking about X and unhelpful for thinking about Y. On these later positive treatments, see Schmidt 2022 (p. 106) and DaVia 2022 (pp. 214–215).

If we thus regard experience in terms of its result, we have bypassed (übersprungen) the genuine process (eigentliche Prozeβ) of experience. In fact, this process is essentially negative. It cannot be described simply as the unbroken generation of typical universals (bruchlose Herausbildung typischer Allgemeinheiten). (TM, pp. 360–361; GW 1, pp 358–359; trans. modif.)

Aristotle, it thus seems, short-circuits the "essentially negative" aspect of experience in at least three ways. First, Gadamer faults him for wrongly assuming that the initial state of the experiencing soul is a state of rest, order and unity. Second, he faults him for simplifying the process by articulating experience only with respect to knowing (Wissen) and the formation of concepts (Begriffsbildung), giving to his readers the impression that experience is a straightforward process leading to universals without resistance or contradictory interruptions. Third, and relatedly, he accuses Aristotle of setting his sight on experience as a result instead of as a process.

It is worth considering briefly a potential Aristotelian response this threefold accusation. First, one may say that by comparing the experiencing soul to a fleeing army progressively reconstructing its order and unity, Aristotle precisely acknowledges the element of negativity, of profound disturbance that the inception of experience represents. As for the alleged focus on the result – the army coming back to order -, it should be recalled that the question that prompts the image is the question of how we do in fact arrive at a grasp of universal principles: insisting on the rout alone could hardly fulfill this purpose. Likewise, Aristotle need not deal with contradictory oppositions that hinder the process of induction, for the question is precisely how a productive experience leading to a positive result works. Yet, a fleeing army would not be a suited image if Aristotle meant to describe productive experience as straightforwardly cumulative and successful: again, the element of disturbance and hardship is captured too. Finally, it is far from clear that what Aristotle means by ἀρχή is reducible to concepts. The meaning of ἀρχή in Aristotle is "principle" or "starting-point" understood in a broad sense. For instance, the principle of non-contradiction is an ἀρχή of rational inquiry, the unmoved mover is the ἀρχή of the whole moving cosmos, particular substances are ἀρχαί of the other substances they contribute generating, and both the major and minor premises of a syllogism work as its ἀρχαί (although only the former is a universal ἀρχή)<sup>10</sup>. Most importantly for the purposes of the present argument, there are not just theoretical but also practical ἀρχαί. Aristotle's account of ἐπαγωγή in APo II 19 is directed not so much toward Begriffsbildung but toward the grasping of principles that allow us in turn to reason deductively from them<sup>11</sup>. Gadamer's dismissal of that account as merely concerned with concepts appears problematic once we recall that both theoretical and practical judgements depend on non-demonstrated principles. I will turn to this problem in Section 4.

Before doing so, let us reformulate the problem of experience as it emerges from the above interpretations. The problem of experience could be stated as follows: there is a fundamental or original sense of experience, and a derivative and denatured sense of experience; Aristotle's account of experience corresponds to the latter, as it falsifies the negative nature of experience in the fundamental sense, and replaces it by an idealistic picture wherein experience is straightforwardly cumulative. Gadamer does not claim that the Aristotelian account is false. He rather claims that it does not speak truly to the experience of hermeneutic consciousness. Aristotle's notion of ἐμπειρία is the forerunner of "scientific procedure in the modern sense" (TM, p. 359), and in extenso of the domination of the natural-scientific model in the very realm of the Geisteswissenchaften, a domination that Wahrheit und Methode as a whole tries to undo. It is not a coincidence, indeed, if Gadamer opens his book with an attack on John Stuart Mill's "logic of the human sciences" which was, after all, a logic of induction (GW 1, p. 9 ff.).

<sup>10</sup> On the different sense of ἀρχή, see esp. Met. Δ 1.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle states plainly in APo II 19 that from universal principles come both ἐπιστήμη and τέχνη (100a8–10). As I show in section 4, NE VI shows that πρᾶξις too rests on universal principles.

We are thus facing a strange and largely overlooked ambivalence in Gadamer's Aristotelianism: when it comes to hermeneutic understanding, Gadamer invites us to turn to Aristotelian φρόνησις, and when it comes to hermeneutic experience, he urges us to run away from Aristotelian ἐμπειρία<sup>12</sup>. Instead, he turns our sight toward a dialectic kind of experience that embraces the negativity of human finitude. The model of such a negative experience is, in its first moment, Hegelian: "It is not Aristotle but, most important, Hegel who testifies to the dialectical element in experience" (TM, p. 362). Hegel's "path of despair," an internalization of the tragic πάθει μάθος, emphasizes the productivity of negativity by showing how negation is always a determinate negation (TM, p. 362). Being contradicted and brought back to its ignorance at each step of its journey, consciousness grows and "acquires new horizons." To be sure, Hegel thinks that dialectic culminates in absolute self-knowledge, but Gadamer famously rejects such possibility: it "does not do justice to hermeneutical consciousness" (TM, p. 364). What he proposes is rather a truncated version of Hegelian dialectic: 13 "The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself" (TM, p. 364). As Gadamer will go on to argue in the subsequent section, this openness as the characteristic

<sup>12</sup> This Gadamerian critique of Aristotle's account of ἐμπειρία as ἐπαγωγή has to my knowledge only been observed by Mariafioti 2022 (p. 79) and Schmidt 2022 (p. 107). She does not, however, confront the difficulty that this raises for Gadamer's interpretation of φρόνησις, as though the relevance of ἐμπειρία was simply a matter of interpreting Aristotle's ethics as "empirical" or not – see Mariafioti 2022 (p. 93n240): "Gadamer stimmt der Auslegung der ethischen Prinzipien des Aristoteles als Ergebnisse einer empirischen Verallgemeinerung dennoch nicht zu."The whole question, of course, is not whether there is something empirical about the acquisition of ethical principles, but how we understand such practical empiricism. I discuss the relevance of ἐμπειρία for φρόνησις in section III. Grondin 1994 (p. 52) speaks of inductive ἐμπειρία as though it played a positive role in Gadamer's account of experience. Although Grondin recognizes that this kind of ἐμπειρία is not mentioned in the Gadamerian analysis of φρόνησις, I hardly understand why the critique of ἐπαγωγή is thusly silenced.

<sup>13</sup> On Gadamer's truncated Hegelianism, see esp. Dahlstrom 2022 (pp. 238–242).

structure of hermeneutic consciousness echoes the priority of the question at work in Socratic-Platonic dialectic (TM, pp. 370–378).

What this rejection of Aristotle and the turn to a truncated, finitized version of Hegelian dialectic inspired by Socrates and Plato point to is Gadamer's consistent defiance of any kind of experience chiefly characterized by a positive, cumulative dimension. To be experienced in the hermeneutic sense means to be fundamentally aware of one's finitude, and thus radically undogmatic (cf. TM, p. 364). But we ought to wonder: can any kind of experience worthy of this name be solely negative? Can it be devoid of any cumulative dimension? It seems striking that even Hegel's "path of despair" comprehends both the negative and the cumulative dimensions. And as I suggested above, something of the sort may very well be at work in Aristotle's image of the fleeing army: after all, a rout, as orderly as it may settle, is not a triumphant victory. Gadamer seems to think that affirming the cumulative dimension of experience is tantamount to forgetting our finitude. Is it possible that this is an exaggerated worry? If we follow the model of Aristotelian practical rationality, I think the answer is: yes. For something like hermeneutic understanding to come into play at all, experience in a positive, productive, cumulative sense seems necessary. This need not mean relinquishing our finitude, but it does mean reassessing the salience of Aristotle's understanding of experience for philosophical hermeneutics. Let us first examine the role of experience in Aristotle's account of φρόνησις.

#### 4. Ἐμπειρία in Aristotelian Practical Rationality

We may begin with a passage in which Aristotle emphasizes the intimate unity of the intellectual virtue of  $\varphi \rho \delta v \eta \sigma \iota \zeta$  and the moral virtue of moderation,  $\sigma \omega \varphi \rho \sigma \sigma \delta v \eta \tau$ :

That is also why we call temperance (σωφροσύνην) by this name, as being what preserves practical wisdom (σώζουσαν τὴν φρόνησιν). And it does preserve the sort of belief (ὑπόληψιν) in question. For what is pleasant or painful does not ruin or distort every sort of belief (for

example, that triangles do or do not contain two right angles) but it does do this to the ones about what is doable in action (ἀλλὰ τὰς περὶ τὸ πρακτόν). For the principles of things doable in action are the that-forthe-sake-of-which of the things doable in action (αί μὲν γὰρ ἀρχαὶ τῶν πρακτῶν τὸ οὖ ἕνεκα τὰ πρακτά). But once someone is ruined by pleasure or pain, to him it does not appear a principle (οὺ φαίνεται ἀρχή) or that it is for the sake of it and because of it that he should choose and do everything, since vice is ruinous of the principle (ἕστι γὰρ ἡ κακία φθαρτικὴ ἀρχῆς). (NE VI 5 1140b11–20; trans. modif.)

We deliberate not about ends, though, but about the things that further ends (οὐ περὶ τῶν τελῶν ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὰ τέλη). For a doctor does not deliberate about whether to cure or an orator about whether to persuade or a politician about whether to produce good government, nor do any of the rest deliberate about their end. Rather, they take the end for granted and investigate in what way and through which things it will come about (ἀλλὰ θέμενοι τὸ τέλος τὸ πῶς καὶ διὰ τίνων ἔσται σκοποῦσι). (NE III 3, 1112b11-16)

This famous passage makes clear that the  $\varphi \rho \acute{o} \nu \mu \sigma \zeta$  deliberates in light of ends that are not found by  $\varphi \rho \acute{o} \nu \eta \sigma \zeta$  itself but rather given to it. This means that the  $\grave{\alpha} \rho \chi \acute{\eta}$  of phronetic judgement is bestowed upon it from a non-phronetic source. Whence? What source? At the end of *NE* I 7, Aristotle asserts that we can get a hold of princi-

ples through three different ways: induction, habituation, or perception (NE I 7 1098b3–4)<sup>14</sup>. We have seen above how inductive experience allows a grasp of  $\dot{\alpha}\rho\chi\alpha$  at least in theoretical matters. And while induction requires perception as one of its steps, here Aristotle seems to suggest that perception alone can also provide one with principles. This is so because "the fact that something is so  $(\tau \dot{\delta} \ \delta' \ \ddot{\delta}\tau 1)$  is a first thing and a principle  $(\pi\rho \ddot{\omega}\tau \dot{\delta}\tau \dot{\delta}\tau \dot{\delta}\tau 1)$ " (NE I 7 1098b2–3). This slightly odd sense of  $\dot{\alpha}\rho\chi\dot{\eta}$ —a "that" brought to light by perception—will indeed prove to play a significant role in the analysis of deliberation in terms of the practical syllogism, but it is not the same kind of  $\dot{\alpha}\rho\chi\dot{\eta}$  as the  $\tau\dot{\epsilon}\lambda\delta\varsigma$  that is ruined by vice or preserved by moderation. For indeed we do not grasp the goals of our actions as we perceive facts. We are thus left with either induction or habituation, and Aristotle later in Book VII seems to settle this question in favor of habituation:

Virtue here seems not only to preserve the principles of action, but to *teach* them. Moral habituation, then, is their *source*. It provides the  $\varphi p \acute{o} \nu \psi o c$  with the  $\mathring{a} p \chi \acute{\eta}$  of action in the sense of its that-for-the-sake-of-which or  $\tau \acute{e} \lambda o c$ . As many commentators have observed 15,

<sup>14</sup> Actually, Aristotle also mentions that we can get hold of principles through "other means" without saying what these are. Although this is free speculation, the passage from NE VII 8 cited below seems to leave the possibility open that natural virtue, as distinguished from habituated virtue, could be such "other means."

<sup>15</sup> See notably Gauthier and Jolif (1970), Aubenque (1963), and Moss (2012), to name but a few of the important ones.

Aristotle's explicit analogy with mathematical demonstrations suggests further parallels between practical and theoretical reasoning. Aristotle will indeed analyze the structure of deliberation as a practical syllogism in NEVI 7, 8 and 11. If the parallelism with theoretical reasoning holds, it would seem that φρόνησις gets its ἀρχή in the sense of the major premise from habituation just as ἐπιστήμη gets its own from induction. That would suggest, as Moss argued, that habituation for Aristotle works as a kind of "practical induction." This in turn would mean that habituation is intimately related to or is itself ἐμπειρία.

Aristotle quite clearly affirms the importance of experience for practical wisdom in at least three passages of Book VI. First, he states that

we should attend to the undemonstrated sayings and beliefs (ταῖς ἀναποδείκτοις φάσεσι καὶ δόξαις) of experienced and older people or practically-wise ones (τῶν ἐμπείρων καὶ πρεσβυτέρων ἢ φρονίμων), no less than to the demonstrations, since, because they have an eye formed from experience, they see correctly (διὰ γὰρ τὸ ἔχειν ἐκ τῆς ἐμπειρίας ὅμμα ὁρῶσιν ὀρθῶς) (NE VI 11 1143b11–14).

Because Aristotle compares φρόνησις to the "eye of the soul (ὅμμα τῆς ψοχῆς)" (NEVI 12 1144a30), this indicates that practical wisdom comes about through experience. This after all should not surprise us since Aristotle had already claimed in Book II that all intellectual virtues required time and experience (cf. NE II 1 1103a16–17). What Book VI adds is that experience allows the coming-to-be of φρόνησις precisely by providing practical principles, that is, principles following which we exercise practical reason. It should first be stated that such practical reasoning, according to the form of the practical syllogism, requires a grasp of both universal principles (major premises) and particular principles (minor premises). Aristotle gives an example of such practical syllogism in NEVI 7:

<sup>16</sup> Moss (2012, pp. 200-233).

Nor is practical wisdom knowledge of universals only. On the contrary, it must also know particulars. For it is practical, and action is concerned with particulars. That is why, in other areas too, some people who lack knowledge (οὐκ εἰδότες)—most of all, those with experience (οἱ ἔμπειροι)—are more effective doers of action than are others who have knowledge <sup>17</sup>. For if someone knows that light meats are digestible and healthy but is ignorant about which sorts of meat are light, he will not produce health; but someone who knows that bird meats are healthy will produce health more. (NEVI 7 1141b14—21)

We can formalize this thusly:

Major: Light meats are healthy (i.e. we should eat light meats)

Minor: Bird meats are light

Conclusion: Bird meats are healthy (i.e. we should eat bird meats)

Before pursuing further, it should be acknowledged right away that a formal analysis of practical reasoning in syllogistic terms suggests a quite mechanical picture of φρόνησις. It is important to note that Aristotle most likely does not think that a practically wise person *explicitly* performs such kind reasoning whenever she deliberates. It is much more likely that he is simply trying to lay before us *thematically* what might be going on with her application of universals to particulars in a very *non-thematic* and *implicit* way. But that does not mean that Aristotle's thematization is a distortion of the phenomenon of practical reasoning, for it is in fact helpful in bringing into light what usually remains hidden to us or what we usually are only able to see retrospectively.

Aristotle claims that experience can supply where knowledge of the minor premise is lacking. Actually, "knowing" the particulars *usually* takes the form of such experienced acquaintance rather than knowledge in any rigorous sense. This is why in the next chapter he directly connects practical wisdom with experience:

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle makes the same point in Metaphysics A 981a12-15.

while young people become geometers and mathematicians and wise in such things, they do not seem to become practically-wise. The explanation is that practical wisdom is concerned also with particulars, knowledge of which comes from experience ( $\dot{\epsilon}\dot{\xi}$   $\dot{\epsilon}\mu\pi\epsilon\iota\rho\dot{\epsilon}\alpha\zeta$ ). But there is no young person who is experienced, since it is quantity of time that produces experience. (NEVI 8 1142a11–15)

Here, Aristotle is talking about principles not in the sense of the τέλος of action or major premise of practical syllogisms, but in the sense of the minor premise (cf. 1142a20–22). This minor premise is a particular, and we get familiar with particulars through repeated encounters with them. It is true that in at least two passages, Aristotle suggests that we grasp these particulars through perception or intellectual insight, νοῦς (see NEVI 8 1142a25-30 and VI 11 1143a35–b5). However, this kind of intellectual perception of the particular or minor premise is fundamentally different than an immediate perception of particular objects or common sensibles (e.g. perceiving my pencil) or proper sensibles (e.g. seeing my pencil's blue color). This is to say that it is not something we can perceive through any of our senses, either alone or working together. One does not perceive the lightness of bird meat without having experienced different kinds of meats<sup>18</sup>. As Gauthier and Jolif argued, the distinctness of the kind of perception at work here is even clearer when we transpose Aristotle's dietary example of the practical syllogism into a properly moral context<sup>19</sup>. Take instead the following example:

Major: Lying is wrong (i.e. we should not lie)

Minor: Saying this/doing this is a lie

Conclusion: Saying this/doing this is wrong (i.e. we should not say or

do this)<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Gasser-Wingate 2021 (pp. 222-224) makes a similar point.

<sup>19</sup> See Gauthier and Jolif 1970 (pp. 537-538).

<sup>20</sup> This is Gauthier and Jolif's example. We could easily see how things get more complicated and less clear if we take another example, such as "We should perform just acts; X is a just act; we should do X."We can see that the perception of the minor "X is a just act" is much more complex than the already complex perception of the minor "X is a lie".

Perceiving that X is a lie is not the kind of perception that straightforwardly obtains in virtue of our perceptual capacities. It is not immediately given to any of our senses<sup>21</sup>. Such moral perception becomes possible only once the agent has had enough experience with various human speeches and actions in various contexts to distinguish between truthful and deceptive ones. To reiterate Aristotle's point, one does not need a formal definition of lying to identify a lie if one has sufficient experience. This much shows that experience is crucial to the kind of moral reasoning that φρόνησις performs insofar as we need experience in order to "know" the particulars we encounter in our practical life. To be sure, this kind of moral experience differs from induction, for induction leads to universals. However, with the Gadamerian conundrum in mind, we should note the following: while this kind of experience is not inductive experience, it nonetheless is a cumulative kind of experience such that one can reliably count on it in encountering particular circumstances. Were this kind of experience essentially negative, that reliability could hardly obtain, and Aristotle would not say that experience offers a grasp of the particulars.

We have seen that practical universal principles take the form of ends for the sake of which actions are performed. And that these ends, the major premises of practical syllogisms, are given to us via habituation. Is habituation, as Moss proposes, a practical kind of induction? Let us take another look at our revised example of the practical syllogism. In the most technical sense, if the major premise "lying is wrong" was grasped through induction, it would arise through a reiteration of particular moral perceptions in the form of "this is a lie, and it is wrong." But what kind of perception would that be? As I have explained, the perception of a lie as such, that is, as a lie, is possible on the basis of an experienced acquaintance with various forms of human speeches and deeds. But how can we come to perceive a lie not just as such, but, in addition, as

<sup>21</sup> Gauthier and Jolif 1970 (p. 537) call this perception a "practical intelligence," (a particular quality of the practical intellect). Saint Thomas (Sententia libri Ethicorum T2, 1249/1964, p. 590) says it is the perception by the "internal sense."

wrong? Aristotle thinks that perception of the good and the bad is possible on the basis of pleasure and pain. Consider the following passage from *De Anima*:

Perceiving, then, is like bare announcing and understanding, but when [the perceived object] is pleasant or painful, [the soul], as if affirming or denying, pursues or avoids. In fact to feel pleasure or pain is to be active with regard to the perceptual mean with regard to what is good or bad, as such (καὶ ἔστι τὸ ἥδεσθαι καὶ λυπεῖσθαι τὸ ἐνεργεῖν τῆ αἰσθητικῆ μεσότητι πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακόν, ἦ τοιαῦτα). (De An. 431a8–11; trans. Reeve)

We should not take Aristotle to mean that pleasure alone gives us a perception of the good. For alas we humans often experience pleasure in wrong or bad things. It is crucial then to ensure a discrimination between good and bad pleasures, such that we get to experience the proper pleasures in what is good, and the proper displeasure or pain in what is bad. This was Plato's insight (*Leg.* II 653a-c), and Aristotle appropriates it in his account of habituation. To be sure, Aristotle thinks that pleasure and pain constitute the real *Stoff* of habituation, but his point is precisely that these have to be *informed* by a proper moral education, wherein reason will unavoidably intervene:<sup>22</sup>

For virtue of character is concerned with pleasures and pains. Indeed, it is because of pleasure that we do base actions and because of pain that we abstain from doing noble ones. That is why we must be brought up in a certain way straight from childhood, as Plato says, so

<sup>22</sup> In the *Politics*, Aristotle makes it perfectly clear that perception of good and bad, as distinguished from mere pains and pleasures, is distinctively human because distinctively *rational* – see *Pol.* 12 1253a10-18. Thus, we are entitled to think that moral education through habituation involves reason and is not, *pace* Moss 2012 and other anti-intellectualists, a non-rational process. While it may not do so from the perspective of young children who are trained by their parents and educators, it is difficult – not to say impossible – to conceive that such educators could do this well without reflecting on their own prudential experience to figure out just what these appropriate pleasures and pains are and how to impart them efficiently in their children or students. Likewise, it is

as to enjoy and be pained by the things we should, since this is what the correct education is. (*NE* II 3 1104b8–13)

Well habituated pleasures and pains provide adequate perceptions of the good and the bad. To perceive a lie as bad thus means that we perceive it alongside a feeling of pain like shame or disgust. But to grasp that lying in general is bad requires that we have repeatedly perceived lies with displeasure, such that we now are disposed to perceive instances of lying as unpleasant, and thus as something to avoid, in a reliable and firm way. It is in this very sense that moral habituation works as a kind of practical induction. Like induction, habituation is a process through which a manifold of repeated similar perceptions (perceptions of good things as pleasant and of bad things as painful) are retained through memory to finally allow a universal principle to emerge in the form of "Pursuing/avoiding X is good/bad." Hence, èμπειρία plays a crucial role in grasping practical ἀρχαί in the sense of the τέλη of human actions.



From what I have argued above, it follows that Aristotle does not consider experience to be relevant only from a theoretical point of view. As much as inductive experience allows a grasp of universal principles that we use in demonstrations, experience has a practical role to play in our grasp of both universal and particular principles of human action. Thus, it would not be exaggerated to claim that Aristotelian practical rationality is *only* possible on the basis of experience: a φρόνιμος is *necessarily* an experienced person. And

hard to think that a well-habituated person will live out her whole life without reflecting critically on her habits, practices, and moral experiences. Otherwise, the picture would be one wherein habituation is transmitted from one generation to another in a non-critical and more or less mechanical way, a view that Gadamer explicitly rejects (see TM, pp. 594–595). By accepting that habituation provides practical principles and refusing that habituation is strictly non-rational, my interpretation stands somewhere in-between the traditional dichotomic status of the debate between intellectualists and anti-intellectualists. For another and interesting way of circumventing this dichotomy, see Eliott 2018.

with respects to both universals and particulars, such a person's experience must be a positive, cumulative kind of experience that progressively builds upon itself toward a firm an unalterable disposition (βεβαίως καὶ ἀμετακινήτως ἔχων, *NE* II 4 1105a33).

# 5. Concluding Remarks: Hermeneutics Between Pericles and Socrates

Gadamer conceives of φρόνησις as the model for hermeneutic understanding. It is, as he said several times, the "fundamental hermeneutic virtue" (hermeneutische Grundtugend)<sup>23</sup>. The historically-effected consciousness of the hermeneutic sponimos has the structure of experience (TM, p. 355). But that person is experienced, Gadamer tells us, in the sense of the hermeneutic experience of finitude, which is negative in its essence. Instead of cumulatively producing firm grounds for understanding, hermeneutic experience is always brought back to its limitations and thus always opens itself up to new horizons. As we have seen, Gadamer explicitly opposes this notion of experience to the one developed by Aristotle, who allegedly "flattens out the nature of hermeneutical experience" (TM, p. 367). Yet, we have also seen that a positive experience of that kind is at work in Aristotle's account of practical rationality, and that "practical empiricism" is a crucial feature of Aristotelian practical philosophy that the hermeneutic appropriation of Aristotle seems to neglect. The question I would like to ask by means of concluding remarks is the following: could a Gadamerian framework accommodate the kind of empiricism put forth by Aristotle in his understanding of the development of φρόνησις as a stable disposition? Although Gadamer wrote numerous times on Aristotelian ethics and how it is worth appropriating for hermeneutic purposes, he barely addressed the question of practical principles<sup>24</sup>. When after Wahrheit und Methode he finally did, he claimed that practical principles could be brought back to the notion of ἔθος: "Ethos is for

<sup>23</sup> See e.g. GW 2 (p. 328) and ANE 12, 15

<sup>24</sup> A similar complaint has been voiced by Kontos 2011 (pp. 129–134) too.

him [Aristotle] the Archê, the 'that' from which all practical-philosophical enlightenment proceeds" (GW 2, p. 315, cf. GW 10, pp. 262–263)<sup>25</sup>. Strictly speaking, this is slightly incorrect: as we have seen, customs and habituation, ἔθος, is the source of practical ἀρχαί and not the ἀρχή itself. On a more charitable reading, however, Gadamer might very well mean that ἔθος is the ἀρχή of practical ἀρχαί, and that would be sound Aristotelianism. The difficulty lies in how, from a Gadamerian viewpoint, we move from ἔθος to the principles that it teaches. This is not a problem from a strictly Aristotelian perspective: for Aristotle, habit progressively constitutes a reliable disposition (ἕξις) to judge and act well. But Gadamer appropriates ἔθος as historicity and ties it to the Heideggerian idea that Dasein as a temporal and historical being is a "thrown project." <sup>26</sup> Thus he sees in  $\xi\theta$ oc the communal facticity in which we are thrown<sup>27</sup>. Yet far from building cumulatively an ethical *Haltung*, this ἔθος leads us instead to an awareness of our human finitude: as soon as we begin to acknowledge the fundamental contingency and groundlessness of the historical  $\xi\theta$ o $\zeta$  to which we inevitably belong, we are calling into question the very resources that allow something like habituation to be brought to fruition. Instead of becoming disposed to reliably act well through an experience that teaches us practical principles to guide our action, we become disposed to acknowledge further and further our limitations:

To acknowledge what is does not just mean to recognize what is at this moment, but to have insight into the limited degree to which the future is still open to expectation and planning or, even more funda-

<sup>25</sup> This seems to mean that ἔθος is also the principle for practical philosophy, not just practical rationality. That Gadamer fails to distinguish between the principles of practical philosophy and of practical rationality is one of the main criticisms voiced by Kontos 2011 against Gadamer's Aristotle. For a similar concern, see Thanassas 2022. Cf. Mariafioti 2022 (pp. 96–97) for a less critical appreciation.

<sup>26</sup> This is very clear in the Louvain lectures of 1957 on "The Problem of Historical Consciousness" – see esp. PHC, pp. 126.

<sup>27</sup> See Mariafioti 2022 (p. 92n239) on tradition as the hermeneutic equivalent of Aristotle's notion of ξθος,

mentally, to have the insight that all the expectation and planning of finite beings is finite and limited. Genuine experience is experience of one's own historicity. (TM, pp. 365–366)

For Aristotle, the very existence of a φρόνιμος depends on good  $\xi\theta$ 0ς; for Gadamer, a hermeneutic φρόνιμος will rather, as Kontos puts it, "cast doubt on the closeness of each particular *ethos*." As Fruchon suggested, and as the progression of Gadamer's text from Hegelian to Platonic dialectic indicates, everything looks as though the paragon of practical wisdom is no longer Aristotle's Pericles but Plato's Socrates<sup>29</sup>.

The worry, again, is the alleged incompatibility between a positive and cumulative experience and the negative experience of human finitude. But are there no other ways to think about these two? Perhaps it is worth here addressing the question anew on Gadamerian grounds instead of Aristotelian ones. After all, the task of hermeneutics is to foster the dialogue with the tradition through interpretive encounters. In doing so, we continuously apply that tradition's meanings to our particular situation. Part of what that task involves is acknowledging the finitude of our situation and, therewith, the unending character of the hermeneutic task. Thus, we should always avoid the temptation of trying to "have the last word." But mere acknowledgement of the provisional character of interpretation is not, as such, a contribution to the task of hermeneutics. For the tentative character of interpretation to be acknowledged, interpretations must be ventured in the first place<sup>31</sup>. And as finite as they are, these interpretations should not be arbitrary.

<sup>28</sup> Kontos 2011 (p. 133).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. TM (pp. 370–378) and Kontos 2011 (p. 132), following Fruchon 1994 (pp. 334, 347–348).

<sup>30</sup> See the ironically last words of Gadamer's 1972 Afterword to Wahrheit und Methode (TM, p. 603): "The ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion. It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word."

<sup>31</sup> I do not mean this as a temporal but rather as an ontological priority: interpreting and acknowledging interpretation's finitude are not a two-steps process, but the latter makes no sense without the former.

Of course, Gadamer does not lay out a "method" of interpretation – his point is precisely that we should avoid bowing before the method-paradigm that is illegitimately invading the Geisteswissenschaften. But that does not mean that Wahrheit und Methode does not provide any principles that can serve as safeguards in our hermeneutic endeavors. One of these principles is that the interpreter should always assume that the text or the interlocutor more generally might be right, that is, that they might have something to teach us that we did not hitherto know. This entails that we should always try to strengthen the interlocutor's position as much as possible in approaching it (TM, pp. 303, 376, 412). Another principle – Gadamer even calls it a rule – is that when we interpret a text or a phenomenon, we should attempt to understand the details in terms of the whole that they constitute and vice versa, aiming at a coherence of the whole and its parts (TM, p. 302). Another one is that interpretation should not aim to understand the interlocutor or the text, but to understand what it is about, the common matter (Sache) that stands between the *interpretans* and the *interpretandum*<sup>32</sup>. A correlate of this principle is that what a successful interpretation achieves is neither a passive reception of the claims made by the *interpretandum* nor an insertion of meaning on the interpreter's part, but the "act of the thing itself," which is the only "true method" of hermeneutics (TM, p. 479). This is by no means an exhaustive list of interpretive principles found in Gadamer's magnum opus, but it should suffice to show that there are such principles and that these play a significant role in giving the task of interpretation its form. This is to say that when we take on the task of articulating interpretations in the spirit of Gadamerian hermeneutics, we have already to a lesser or greater degree internalized some of these principles into something like a hermeneutic disposition.

This, I contend, is precisely the hermeneutic counterpart to Aristotle's view that φρόνησις is a ἕξις shaped by practical ἀρχαί

<sup>32</sup> E.g. TM (pp. 187, 282, 300–306, 375–76, 401, 405–406, 409, 412, 420, 426, 462, 480, 489).

acquired through the cumulative experience we call habituation. It would be a stretch to claim that hermeneutic principles are also acquired through habituation. But it would be equally a stretch to deny that something else than the negative experience of human finitude is required for us to get a grasp of such principles of hermeneutic understanding. What we need is something like a hermeneutic education, a *Bildung* that progressively forms a good hermeneutic disposition  $^{33}$ . In this sense, the positive and cumulative kind of experience depicted by Aristotle is far from being irrelevant to the hermeneutic appropriation of  $\phi$ póv $\eta$ o $\phi$ c. And while Gadamer did not acknowledge this himself, a Gadamerian perspective could appropriate that kind of experience in the form of a practical empiricism.

So, while the status of Aristotle in Wahrheit und Methode remains ambivalent, oscillating between an appropriation of  $\phi\rho\acute{o}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  and a rejection of Aristotle's account of  $\dot\epsilon\mu\pi\epsilon\nu\dot\rho\alpha$ , it needed not be so. For the experience that constitutes the disposition of the  $\phi\rho\acute{o}\nu\mu\sigma\varsigma$ , while structurally different than the dialectical experience of finitude, is not incompatible with it. Rather we should see that the latter depends on the former, in the sense that the acknowledgement of the finitude of hermeneutic understanding supposes that we first attempt to articulate and bring into language the best interpretations we can, and this requires another experience than tragedy's  $\pi\acute{a}\theta\epsilon\iota$   $\mu\acute{a}\theta\sigma\varsigma$ . The  $\phi\rho\acute{o}\nu\mu\sigma\varsigma$  is not prone to the pitfall of dogmatism, for she knows that there is no universally perfect action in the human realm. Yet that awareness does not prevent her from trying to figure out what the best course of action seems to be in each circumstance, and to act accordingly. Figuratively, we need

<sup>33</sup> Consider for instance what Gadamer writes about Hegel's views on Bildung as a rising to the universal in both theoretical and practical matters (TM, p. 11): "Rising to the universal is not limited to theoretical Bildung and does not mean only a theoretical orientation in contrast to a practical one, but covers the essential character of human rationality as a whole." Gadamer sees a connection between the "Greek ideal of Bildung" and Aristotelian φρόνησις in Roman political life as well as in the later humanistic notion of sensus communis (TM, pp. 19–21), but unfortunately does not develop these connections further.

not only Socratic *docta ignorantia*, but also Periclean ventures. Hermeneutics after all is not just the illumination of historicity and finitude, but also a risk-taking adventure that demands boldness and courage just as much as humility and moderation<sup>34</sup>. As I hope to have shown, this difficult equilibrium, the proper inbetweenness of hermeneutics, is best preserved if we do not disparage Aristotle's empiricism as irrelevant to hermeneutic experience, and rather appropriate it along Gadamer's own appropriation of φρόνησις<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> On hermeneutics as risk-taking, see e.g. TM (pp. 110-111, 310, 406).

<sup>35</sup> I thank Benjamin Crowe and François Renaud for their comments on an earlier draft of this text. This chapter draws on research supported by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec – Secteur Société et Culture.

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# CAPÍTULO XIII / CHAPTER XIII

# GADAMER EN DIÁLOGO CON LOS PENSADORES INICIALES

Einar Iván Monroy Gutiérrez

#### RESUMEN

Los esfuerzos de Gadamer por interpretar el pensamiento clásico comienzan tempranamente. De una parte, al lado del primer Heidegger, ya que por aquella época el Estagirita era la autoridad indiscutible sobre los comienzos del pensamiento griego. De la otra, Platón entraría en el horizonte filosófico y científico (filología) de Gadamer en virtud de las enseñanzas y amistad con Paul Friedländer, de quien reconocería el carácter dialógico de los Diálogos. A partir de esta mediación platónico-aristotélica, Gadamer hará parte de una larga línea de intérpretes de los presocráticos que comienza con la prehistoria del humanismo moderno, pasando por Hegel, Schleiermacher, Zeller, Dilthey, Nietzsche y Heidegger. El propósito del capítulo es recrear el aporte gadameriano a la discusión contemporánea en torno a los presocráticos. Nuestra

pregunta puede formularse en los siguientes términos: ¿Cuál es la relevancia de la interpretación gadameriana de los presocráticos, así como el peso de Platón y Aristóteles, y las conclusiones que nos ofrecen sus problemas, intereses y lecturas? Como hipótesis de trabajo planteamos que Gadamer vuelve hacia los presocráticos, a través de Platón y Aristóteles, desde los problemas de su presente. Desarrollaremos nuestra interpretación en cinco momentos: 1. Los diálogos platónicos y el corpus aristotelicum como unidad de la fragmentariedad de los textos presocráticos. 2. Problema y sentido del inicio (Anfang). 3. Anaximandro y la compensación recíproca de los entes. 4. Transmisión y estudios heraclíteos. 5. Parménides, las dóxai brotòn y el ser. 6. Conclusiones.

Palabras clave: Presocráticos, Gadamer, Platón, Aristóteles, Hermenéutica

#### **ABSTRACT**

Gadamer's efforts to interpret classical thought began early. On one hand, alongside the early Heidegger, since at that time the Stagirite was the undisputed authority on the beginnings of Greek thought. On the other hand, Plato would enter Gadamer's philosophical and scientific (philological) horizon through the teachings and friendship with Paul Friedländer, from whom he would acknowledge the dialogical character of the Dialogues. Starting from this Platonic-Aristotelian mediation, Gadamer would become part of a long line of interpreters of the pre-Socratics that begins with the prehistory of modern humanism, passing through Hegel, Schleiermacher, Zeller, Dilthey, Nietzsche and Heidegger. The purpose of this chapter is to recreate Gadamer's contribution to the contemporary discussion around the pre-Socratics. Our question can be formulated in the following terms: What is the relevance of Gadamer's interpretation of the pre-Socratics, as well as the weight of Plato and Aristotle, and the conclusions offered by their problems, interests and readings? As a working hypothesis, we propose that Gadamer turns towards the pre-Socratics, through Plato and Aristotle, from the problems of his present. We will develop our interpretation in five moments: 1. The Platonic dialogues and the corpus aristotelicum as a unity of the fragmentary nature of pre-Socratic texts. 2. Problem and meaning of the beginning (Anfang). 3. Anaximander and the reciprocal compensation of beings. 4. Heraclitean transmission and studies. 5. Parmenides, the dóxai brotòn and being. 6. Conclusions.

**Keywords:** Presocratics, Gadamer, Plato, Aristotle, Hermeneutics.

#### 1. Introducción

¿Qué conocimientos podemos tener sobre Anaximandro, Heráclito y Parménides desde Platón y Aristóteles? ¿Qué conclusiones retrospectivas sobre la doctrina original nos ofrecen sus problemas, intereses y lecturas de sus predecesores? Como podremos constatar, Platón y Aristóteles se convierten para Gadamer en el hilo conductor filosófico y metodológico para tener conocimiento sobre los presocráticos Anaximandro, Heráclito y Parménides. Gadamer va hacia, y en tal ir, allana el camino por el que transita, y en tal allanar, deja ver aquello hacia lo que tiende. Despejar el camino es ya un modo de aproximarse hacia lo que se encamina.

# 2. Problema y sentido del inicio (Anfang)

Investigar sobre el *principio* de la filosofía griega no está movido solamente por un interés histórico, sino sobre todo porque tiene *actualidad*, nos ayuda a comprender nuestro *destino* (Gadamer, 1999, p. 13). El problema es que la polisemia de la palabra "principio" puede conducir sólo a un historicismo sin filosofía. Se advierten tres sentidos de la palabra griega ἀρχή: principio, comienzo u origen de algo; doctrina sobre los principios; y *Anfang, inicio* (Gadamer, 1999, p. 17). Ahora bien, se puede comprender el *principio* a partir del contraste entre comienzo y final. De una parte, el sentido de comienzo entraña el problema de lo que es anterior y por tanto de un regreso al infinito. Así, el comienzo de la filosofía se atribuye

desde Aristóteles a los fisiólogos, o a Homero y Hesíodo (Aristóteles, 2003a, p 80–82). Pero antes que Tales, Homero y Hesíodo está la lengua griega que ofrece tres posibilidades: el neutro, que no indica una cosa, ni su cualidad, sino a una presencia plena, que llena todo espacio (Gadamer, 2001, p. 51); el verbo ser, como cópula de sujeto y predicado, esto es, lo que los coliga en la proposición; la recepción y perfección del *alfabeto*, sin el cual sería impensable a Homero, Hesíodo, Tales y de ahí hasta hoy (Gadamer, 1999, p. 26).

De la otra, como bien lo expresa Gadamer, "algo sólo puede ser inicio en relación con un fin o una meta" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 19). El sentido del principio se aclara si tenemos en cuenta, más que el comienzo, el final. Sin embargo, esta perspectiva también supone un problema: anticipar un final es ya presuponer el sentido de principio, sobre todo si tenemos en cuenta que "nuestra comprensión del inicio a partir del final no es jamás definitiva" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 25). Provisionalmente queda claro que inicio y fin se correlacionan, lo cual supone un problema aún mayor: su teleología. Este es el significado de «inicio» como "el reflexivo en relación con el comienzo y el fin" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 26. Cursiva mía).

La tesis gadameriana de entender el inicio en relación al punto de llegada, es explicada a través de cuatro perspectivas: a) el final o acabamiento de la metafísica en las ciencias positivas del siglo XIX, en cuyo caso el principio ya estaría señalado por el mismo Aristóteles (2003a) cuando afirmó en Metafísica I, 3 983b20-1984a que Tales fue el que no contó mitos sino que se basó en demostraciones; b) la cultura científica, si bien está relacionado con el anterior, Gadamer reconoce que mientras aquella habría terminado en el siglo XIX, ésta es el "destino de la humanidad"; c) el final del hombre, concepto conocido a través de Foucault y otros. La crítica a estas tres perspectivas es que ni el acabamiento de la metafísica es tan evidente, ni la comprensión de final es muy clara. Por último, tenemos la perspectiva propiamente gadameriana, d) la "inicialidad" (Anfänglichkeit), "el ser inicial (Anfänglichsein)" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 22), aquello que no está orientado ni determinado, lo cual supone la garantía de todos los desarrollos y determinaciones posibles,

cuyo final sólo puede ser comprendido como "virtualidad" en el sentido de "estar orientado hacia un futuro indeterminado" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 23). En otras palabras, se trata del arco de tensión entre pasado y futuro, entre memoria y esperanza.

# 3. Los diálogos platónicos y el *corpus aristotelicum* como unidad ante la fragmentariedad de los textos presocráticos

Los esfuerzos de Gadamer por interpretar la filosofía griega comienzan al lado de Heidegger en Marburgo, inicialmente en torno a la Ética nicomáquea de Aristóteles, pues el estagirita "figuraba como el testimonio del comienzo del pensamiento griego en general" (Grondin, 2000, p. 158ss; 2003, p. 24ss). Platón entraría en el horizonte filosófico y filológico de Gadamer en virtud de las enseñanzas y amistad con Paul Friedländer, de quien aprendería a reconocer el carácter dialógico de los Diálogos.

La razón por la cual la reflexión filosófica de Gadamer sobre los presocráticos está mediada por Platón y Aristóteles puede reconocerse en varios de esos escritos; sin embargo, sólo nos detendremos en los pasajes más explícitos. Platón y Aristóteles son la transmisión accesible de los presocráticos y su única aproximación filosófica válida (Gadamer, 1999, p. 14; 2001, pp. 9–10; 1985, p. 59; 2001, p. 108). Sin embargo, advierte también que los presocráticos empiezan a llamar la atención, no sólo en el romanticismo, sino incluso mucho antes (Gadamer, 1975, p. 21. Cfr. Torre, 1976, pp. 7–41), aunque reconoce que el gran mérito de abrir dicha tarea lo tienen de un modo prominente tanto Hegel como Schleiermacher, a los que Eduard Zeller y Wilhelm Dilthey diesen continuidad respectivamente (Gadamer, 1999, pp. 14–16; 1991b, pp. 32–42).

Una de las razones más convincentes que Gadamer ofrece a su tesis de estudiar a los presocráticos vía Platón y Aristóteles, además del contenido, está también el asunto de orden metodológico, esto es, Platón y Aristóteles no tenían intereses historicistas, "sino que se guiaron por sus propios intereses, por su propia búsqueda de la verdad" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 39). Para evitar caer en un "historicismo sin filosofía", Gadamer plantea una lectura de los presocráticos desde el sólido terreno de los problemas e intereses de la filosofía de Platón y Aristóteles. El modo como Aristóteles entiende a Platón supone ya el modo como el estagirita ha comprendido a los presocráticos en una visión retrospectiva. Pero, según Gadamer, ¿cómo consideran Platón y Aristóteles los antecedentes de su filosofía? La posición del Ateniense se advierte en la interpretación del Fedón, Teeteto y Sofista, específicamente sobre el problema de la inmortalidad y los conceptos naturalista y espiritualista del alma, la relación entre fluir y estabilidad, y el conocimiento como lógos respectivamente. En cuanto al Estagirita, a través de la interpretación de algunos pasajes de la Física y Metafísica, fundamentalmente a partir del problema de la φύσις.

En el caso de Platón, Gadamer es consciente que sus escritos no son "una fuente histórica para establecer la cronología de los presocráticos" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 77), entre otras cosas, por las razones que hemos reseñado anteriormente, porque se trata de una clasificación lógica a partir de la cual se abre una perspectiva más reflexiva, en la que se busca superar la narración mítica, consistente en dar por supuesto lo que significa ente y avanzar en la comprensión del ente en cuanto ente (Gadamer, 1999, p. 78).

Sin embargo, lo decisivo es que Platón glosa el pensamiento de sus predecesores para demostrar la plausibilidad de su propuesta. Es así como en el Fedón, Gadamer (1999, p. 54) encuentra que, entre los dos temas del diálogo, el del suicidio y vida después de la muerte, y el de la inmortalidad del alma, el ideal de purificación no sólo los une, sino que también es pretexto para su interpretación de los presocráticos, muy especialmente del pitagorismo, así como para su propuesta. Así mismo, en los argumentos sobre la inmortalidad del alma se vislumbran también algunas aproximaciones a sus predecesores: la concepción del carácter cíclico de la naturaleza—γένεσις-φθορά—y con ella la concepción del alma de modo "naturalista" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 56). El otro argumento es el de la ἀνάμνεσις que supone al conocimiento como recordación, ya que

la experiencia sensible no da cuenta de ciertos conceptos como lo igual. También en las objeciones contra la inmortalidad del alma, Gadamer (1999) encuentra "cómo considera Platón (...), las teorías de los presocráticos" (p. 58). Para Simias el alma—armonía se disuelve cuando el cuerpo muere; para Cebes, se consume con la transmigración en los diferentes cuerpos. En estas también prima la visión naturalista (Gadamer, 1999, p. 59). Sócrates, por su parte objeta a Simias que la armonía no es una propiedad del alma, sino un bien al que se orienta, cuestión que Gadamer encuentra como conflicto entre una teoría naturalista-matemática y una finalista (Gadamer, 1999, p. 56). Ante el argumento del carácter cíclico aflora el problema del flujo y la permanencia. A partir de Fedón 96a, encontramos que Sócrates cuenta cómo indagó en las ciencias de su tiempo—fisiología milesia y medicina—en torno a la formación del alma, el cerebro como sede de las sensaciones y la formación de la memoria y la opinión; en torno a la causa del νοῦς creyó que Anaxágoras le proveería la respuesta (Gadamer, 1999, p. 63).

Gadamer encuentra que cuando Sócrates afirma en Fedón 99c al bien como principio—que no es un ente físico—de todas las cosas, allí aparece una comprensión de "el todo" distinto a la suma de particulares, así como el planteamiento de una comprensión no cíclica, sino teleológica de la naturaleza (Gadamer, 1999, p. 64). De la identificación de la causa con la idea, idéntica a sí misma, aunque interrelacionada con otras ideas, se sigue que el alma está relacionada con la idea de vida y por tanto con ἀθάνατος, inmortal y ἀνώλεθρος, imperecedero (Fedón, 105ess), a través de lo cual aquélla se eleva a un plano eidético, pues mientras de θάνατος se tiene experiencia, no así de ὅλεθρος, la nada (Gadamer, 1999, p. 68).

Otro problema decisivo que Gadamer encuentra en el Fedón es la "ambigüedad del concepto del alma", como "principio de vida" y como "sede del pensamiento" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 69). De una parte, pensar no es juzgar, sino presenciar del ser en el sentido de pensamiento de la presencia-vida, permanencia-flujo de las cosas, la reflexión de la vida en la conciencia; de la otra, se encuentra el sentido de la oscilación entre *inicio* como principio de vida y como principio

del pensar. Dos conclusiones advierte Gadamer en el diálogo: el argumento más plausible sobre la inmortalidad del alma está demostrado con la vida honrada que Sócrates ha llevado hasta sus últimas consecuencias; si bien la tradición interpreta la argumentación como una demostración de la inmortalidad de las ideas de vida y de alma, mas no del particular individual, en sentido estricto no es un problema platónico pues "Para él es evidente que la verdadera esencia, el verdadero ser, se manifiesta en el lenguaje, y que el lenguaje puede alcanzar con palabras lo que es" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 70) y, en definitiva, que las ideas son inseparables del particular.

En el *Teeteto*, Gadamer (1999) encuentra una reformulación del problema de la comprensión naturalista y finalista del alma. El punto de partida es la pregunta por el conocimiento. La primera respuesta es la del conocimiento como αἴσθεσις, que no es sensación, choque de los sentidos con los entes como irónicamente Platón refiere a sus predecesores, los *reóntes*, partidarios del flujo universal de las cosas—Heráclito, Empédocles, Protágoras, Homero, Epicarmo—sino percepción evidente como parece atribuir a los *stasiótai*, revolucionarios partidarios de la identidad y permanencia. La segunda respuesta es la del conocimiento simplemente como δόξα y la tercera, la de la opinión acompañada de λόγος, razón (pp. 73–75).

El problema vendrá a dirimirse en el *Sofista* 242css. En boca del extranjero de Elea, aparece la cuestión del ente y los relatos en torno a él. La clasificación no es cronológica, sino lógico-pitagórica. Unos dicen que tres son os principios—Gadamer considera que no hay una respuesta satisfactoria en torno a quiénes se refiere Platón— otros que dos, otros que uno—los eléatas—y otros que uno y muchos—alternantes (Empédocles) o dialécticos (Heráclito). El mismo extranjero reclama, a la vez que sugiere, en 243a que de la narración mítica de los predecesores es necesario elevar la reflexión a un nivel superior, pues más que cuántos y cómo se relacionan, el problema esencial es el *sentido* mismo del ente (Gadamer, 1999, pp. 76–77; 1991b, p. 47; 2001, pp. 36–37), en torno del cual entran en controversia dos posiciones. De una parte, están

los que la tradición denomina como "materialistas", atribución ingenua, insuficiente y anacrónica ya que, por un lado, en los presocráticos no hay un concepto de materia, por el otro, en el *Sofista* 246a, se refiere a ellos como "los que pretenden que existen sólo las cosas que se pueden agarrar y tocar con las manos (...) para indicar a los que identifican el ser con lo que es tangible" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 79). Por otra, los llamados "amigos de las ideas", que sostienen la inmovilidad e inmutabilidad del ser, pero que finalmente sucumben ante la necesidad de que el ente se mueva (Gadamer, 1999, pp. 79–80).

Permanencia y estabilidad, vida y espíritu son según Gadamer los problemas del *Fedón*, *Teeteto y Sofista*. En este último, se desarrolla a través de "la compleja dialéctica de estos cinco conceptos fundamentales: ente, movimiento, reposo, igualdad y diversidad" (Gadamer 1999, p. 80) y se resuelve con la mutua pertenencia de lo idéntico y lo diverso como explicación de la unidad de movimiento y quietud. Ahora bien, para Gadamer, lo decisivo en Platón será la oscilación que se da en la conciencia entre el pensar como identificar (la presencia) y moverse (acción), lo que supone la temporalidad (Gadamer, 1999, p. 81).

En cuanto a Aristóteles, Gadamer insiste en leerlo en relación con Platón, tanto en sus continuidades como en sus diferencias, para comprender su relación con sus predecesores. Si bien es cierto que el punto de partida entre ellos es el mismo, "la «fuga hacia los logoi»" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 87), el camino y el punto de llegada son distintos, pues mientras Platón, dejando de lado el problema de la contingencia, se orienta hacia las matemáticas, ya que los números no son instrumentos para medir la realidad, sino el orden mismo que la tasa; además explica el inicio de la naturaleza mediante el Demiurgo que como τεχνίτης hace las cosas tomando las ideas, que no son su creación, sino su modelo; en contraste, Aristóteles se orienta hacia la física y la biología, lo cual supone no sólo una predilección por la dinamicidad de lo particular, del ente, la exigencia del recurso a los conceptos en lugar de imágenes y narraciones, así como una postura contra la cosmología matemá-

tico-pitagórica de Platón de la que pende el recurso al Demiurgo en el *Timeo* o al espíritu en el *Filebo*, con el cual pretende explicar aquello que pone el límite, medida o síntesis entre lo ilimitado y limitado, presentando su doctrina de las cuatro causas. Dice Gadamer que el objetivo de la *Física* es una crítica a Platón por su negación de la existencia del movimiento, aún más, que "la crítica a los eleatas es una crítica a Platón" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 90). También afirma que Simplicio recogió la primera parte del *Poema* de Parménides porque ella fue la parte objeto de la crítica aristotélica (Gadamer, 1999, p. 90; 2001, p. 10) mientras que la segunda, la que hablaba de las cosas en movimiento, posiblemente desapareció porque al estagirita no le generó ninguna crítica. Es claro que para Aristóteles hay un paralelo entre la primera parte del *Poema* y el pensamiento de Platón, y entre la segunda parte y el suyo.

Finalmente, mientras que Platón reclama a sus predecesores una falta de conceptualización, porque es claro que no hay un concepto del ente, Aristóteles extraña el de intención. Dentro de su doctrina de las cuatro causas, la ΰλη es un ente a medias porque le falta lo decisivo, esto es, el desarrollo en sí misma. Si esto es así, ; cómo resolver la cuestión de la determinación sin tener que recurrir a un Demiurgo como en el caso de Platón? ¿Cómo resolver, en últimas, la cuestión del devenir? Por una parte, la cuestión se resuelve con el ὑποκείμενον, sustrato o substantia que no sólo persiste en el cambio, esto es, que no sólo se mantiene dentro de una comprensión del ser como presencia, sino, sobre todo, que "contiene dentro de sí mismo el inicio de su movimiento, esto es, el principio de su desarrollo" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 96), y, por tanto, efectúa—mas no interviene—algo en la realidad de los entes; por la otra, el problema de la contradicción interna del movimiento lo explica Aristóteles a través de la privación, del ser en potencia y del ser en acto. Podría inferirse que los problemas e intereses de Aristóteles emergen desde y contra Platón, por tanto, la lectura aristotélica de los predecesores está determinada por la lectura platónica de los mismos.

Después de esta digresión, consideremos dos puntos relevantes de Aristóteles en relación con sus predecesores en la que, como se ha dicho, Platón es el gozne. Por un lado, Aristóteles busca en sus predecesores los argumentos que no sólo dejen ver la solidez de su crítica a Platón, sino también la plausibilidad de su nueva perspectiva. En Física I, 2–3 y 4, 184bss, Aristóteles (1995, p. 84ss) habla de los eléatas y de los físicos, naturalistas o fisiólogos, respectivamente. La lógica de clasificación de Aristóteles ya no es por el número de principios, ni siquiera la causa, como en Platón, sino por los que consideran el principio del movimiento, de los que hay dos tipos: los que explican el principio de las cosas por condensación y rarefacción de un sustrato y los que lo hacen por la separación de una mezcla primigenia. Y por el otro, Gadamer encuentra que, por encima de las diferencias entre los distintos pensadores, y de las contradicciones que se encuentren entre la Física y Metafísica de Aristóteles, al menos una cuestión sí es segura: el problema de la φύσις como aquello que permanece en el movimiento y diversidad, "una realidad observable que se sostiene y se ordena por sí misma (Gadamer, 1999, p. 107). En otra parte, dice que la perspectiva que guía a Aristóteles es la intuición de la naturaleza del universo que enseña que "este se sostiene a sí mismo, se mueve y se ordena, es equilibrio en sí mismo" (Gadamer, 2001, p. 40).

# 4. Anaximandro y la compensación recíproca de los entes

¿Qué conocimientos podemos tener sobre Anaximandro desde Parménides, Platón y Aristóteles? ¿Qué conclusiones retrospectivas sobre la doctrina original nos ofrecen sus problemas, intereses y lecturas en sus obras? Gadamer encuentra tanto en el *Timeo* (Platón, 1992) como en el *Fedón* (Platón, 1988), algunas pruebas sobre su apropiación de Anaximandro (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 58–70; 2001, pp. 107–124). La primera cuestión en litigio es la doctrina de la pluralidad de mundos, de si es simultáneo o una sucesión en el tiempo según *Timeo*, 31ass. Los argumentos que Platón expone para negar tanto los plurales como los innumerables mundos no le

son suficientemente claros a Gadamer por pretender "demostrar la unicidad (*die Einzigkeit*) de nuestro mundo a partir únicamente de ideas" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 63; 2001, p. 114) y para ello, sólo una, "la copia del modelo del ser vivo perfectísimo, que abarca todo lo vivo (παντεχὲς ζῷον 31b1) está llena de problemas" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 63; 2001, p. 114); uno de ellos, si no el principal, es que la idea de un prototipo conduce a la del demiurgo. Platón utiliza un modelo técnico para algo no técnico.

Una cosa es admisible para Gadamer: "sólo en la perspectiva del todo se piensa realmente la idea del todo, de lo abarcante como la unidad que lo es todo" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 64; 2001, p. 115), cuyo ejemplo más palmario lo encuentra en el Fedón con el ejemplo del dos, que no resulta de una composición, ni de una división, sino de su unidad misma. La representación de lo omniabarcante, ya como τὰ πάντα, ya como ἄπειρον, "como la extensión ilimitada de ser, que no permite nunca llegar a un final" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 64; 2001, p. 115. Cursiva mía) es insuficiente para una comprensión de unidad. Algunas ideas que se derivan de la interpretación son: de esta falta que Platón (1988b) encuentra en lo que él subsume bajo la expresión "heraclíteos" (Teeteto, 179de) se hallan exentos los "eléatas" (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 60 y 64; 2001, pp. 110 y 116); a través del retrovisor eleático se mira la realidad jónica, es decir, el problema de la φύσις, en palabras de Gadamer "la representación del «por sí mismo», que distingue la emergencia y la existencia de nuestro mundo" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 64; 2001, p. 116); posteriormente ampliará la comprensión de este «Von Selbst» del siguiente modo: "el orden, la constancia y regularidad del todo del ser" (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 66–67; 2001, p. 119); lo ilimitado, como ἀρχή, reserva de la que se desprenden sucesivamente mundos, no sólo admite, sino que hace necesaria la existencia simultánea, a la luz de la doctrina de la compensación de los opuestos (12B 1 DK), y también, su divinidad (12A 15 DK) supone un paso delante de la divinidad de los dioses homéricos.

La posición de la tierra en el centro del universo es otra cuestión que Platón considera teniendo en mente a Anaximandro, basado, esta vez, en el pitagorismo. Platón explica la situación de la tierra mediante una "teleología geométrica" (Fedón, 99c) más que por una relación de equilibrio; y de los pasajes del Fedón, 108e–109a dice Gadamer: "la ὁμοιότης del cielo, su ἰσορροπία, basta para que la tierra permanezca en el centro sin inclinarse" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 64; 2001, p. 116), eso sí, teniendo una representación esférica de la tierra. Es claro que lo anterior es una contraposición, no sólo al mito del Atlas, sino también a los torbellinos o cojines de aire como parece haber afirmado Anaximandro (12A 20 DK), quien comprendía la tierra como una columna cilíndrica (12A 10, 11, 25 DK). En definitiva, como bien lo concluye Gadamer, su propia cosmología teológico-eidética exige una argumentación puramente geométrica (Gadamer, 1985, p. 66; 2001, p. 118).

De otra parte, Gadamer plantea cómo la filosofía presocrática se efectúa en, a la vez que provoca la filosofía aristotélica, en definitiva, ve un diálogo vivo entre Aristóteles y sus predecesores (Gadamer, 1999, p. 87). Dicho esto, procedamos a revisar el diálogo mantenido por Aristóteles con Anaximandro. En primer lugar, en Física I 4, 187a 11ss., Aristóteles (1995) agrupa en dos tipos a los naturalistas, no de acuerdo con el número de principios, sino con lo que hace surgir las cosas, con lo inicial del movimiento: en el grupo de los πυκνότης/μανότης—los que defienden el surgir por condensación y rarefacción—sitúa a los milesios Tales y Anaxímenes; en el otro grupo, a los que explican el surgir por la ἔκκρισις—separación de mezclas—sitúa a Anaximandro, Empédocles, pero sobre todo a Anaxágoras (Gadamer, 1999, p. 91). Gadamer encuentra en esto una situación problemática: si mezcla y separación es el modelo contrapuesto al eleático en su negación de la pluralidad y mutabilidad de las cosas, entonces la vinculación de Anaximandro con la incipiente teoría corpuscular resulta ser un anacronismo. "Lo que ocurre en realidad es que la filosofía de Anaximandro se superpone aquí a la teoría de Anaxágoras" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 92). Ahora bien, la justificación de la visión aristotélica se debe, según Gadamer, a que también se le atribuye a Anaximandro "una cosmogonía que parte de la eclosión de un huevo cósmico primigenio" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 92) como aquello de lo cual se separan y diferencian las cosas.

En segundo lugar, Gadamer analiza con más profundidad el conocimiento que Aristóteles tenía de los jonios, en cuyo caso sólo nos detendremos en Anaximandro, a la vez que interpreta el fragmento 12B 1 DK (Diels y Kranz, 1960, p. 89). A partir de ello, podemos resaltar algunas cuestiones importantes: primero, divide el fragmento en cuatro partes: a) "Lo ilimitado se halla en el inicio del todo"; b) "allí donde los entes tienen su origen, su llegar a ser, allí mismo se encuentra también su perecer (...) la disolución tiene lugar siempre según la necesidad"; c) "los entes sufren el castigo y pagan la pena unos a otros"; d) "según la disposición del tiempo" (Gadamer, 1999, pp. 102–104). De a) dice que ἀρχὴν hay que comprenderlo simplemente como *inicio*, en sentido temporal, y no el sentido metafísico de principio (Gadamer, 1999, p. 102), lo inicial como lo que no tiene inicio, sino que es un principiar continuo (Gadamer, 1999, p. 104); así mismo, ἄπειρον no significa "sustancia indeterminada", sino lo "que, al girar siempre sobre sí mismo (...) no tiene inicio ni final" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 104). En cuanto a b) llama la atención sobre la traducción de φθορὰν por disolución; de c) recuerda la deficiencia interpretativa que desde Schopenhauer a Nietzsche se presenta a causa del desconocimiento de la expresión άλλήλοις, cuyo sentido esencial es el de señalar la especularidad de "las oposiciones (ἐναντία), esto es, a los opuestos y su recíproca trabazón" (...) la perpetua compensación" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 104), con la cual se apunta al orden y equilibrio entre los fenómenos; a d), partiendo de Franz Dirlmeier, lo considera más un añadido de Simplicio, una interpretación suya, así mismo plantea que la interpretación jurídica del tiempo por parte de Jaeger no está justificada, si bien le reconoce tanto el logro de depurar el pensamiento de Anaximandro de cualquier tinte religioso de corte budista, así como reconocer la proveniencia política y social de su lenguaje (Gadamer, 1999, p. 104).

Finalmente, abordemos los planteamientos que se encuentran en *Parménides y las opiniones de los mortales y Parménides y el ser*. En el pri-

mero de ellos, una vez hecho el anuncio del tránsito de la primera parte, la de la verdad, a la segunda, la de las opiniones, fragmento 28B VIII, 50–52, Gadamer observa que a partir del verso 53, en el que se encuentran nombradas las dos figuras de entes, hay una alusión al problema de los milesios, el devenir de la naturaleza (Gadamer, 1999, p. 120). Aquí es donde entraría Anaximandro y su comprensión del devenir como equilibrio de opuestos. En el verso 54, Gadamer encuentra un error en la interpretación tradicional al atribuir a μίαν el sentido de "una de éstas", "una de las cuales" que es propiamente el de ἕτερα; realmente μίαν hace referencia a la unicidad de lo duplo, de los ταντία, expresión poética de τὰ ἐναντία, los opuestos, tal como dice en el verso 55 y se desarrolla en los siguientes, idea de claras resonancias jónicas como en lo ἄπειρον en lo que los entes se ajustan ἀλλήλοις, unos a otros, encontrando equilibrio. Para Gadamer, "las dos formas separadas de las que habla el texto remiten a una teoría de los opuestos, los cuales siempre alcanzan el equilibrio, sea entre calor y frío o entre luz y oscuridad" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 121). En el verso 56 encontramos χωρὶς ἀπ' ἀλλήλων, es decir, que las opiniones de los mortales no sólo distinguieron las dos formas como opuestas, sino que además separaron sus señas unas de otras, versos en los cuales Gadamer ve sugerir la reciprocidad e inseparabilidad de los opuestos que en los milesios es múltiple, mientras Parménides reduce a dos: fuego y noche o luz y tinieblas, aquélla que deja ver el ser, ésta que lo encubre.

A modo de conclusión, podemos glosar lo que Gadamer retoma en *Parménides y el ser*. Nuevamente destaca que en el *Poema* de Parménides resuenan las concepciones jónicas sobre la naturaleza, y de un modo destacado el equilibrio de los opuestos de Anaximandro. Ahora bien, la gran innovación es que Parménides no sólo sintetiza los opuestos a fuego y noche, sino que los pone en relación con el conocimiento del ser (Gadamer, 1999, p. 130).

## 5. Transmisión y estudios Heraclíteos

Los estudios gadamerianos sobre Heráclito están recogidos principalmente en los siguientes textos: Von Anfang bei Heraklit, Hegel und Heraklit y los Heraklit-Studien. Antes de entrar en el detalle de su interpretación, hacemos tres digresiones, las cuales son indicadoras del proceder gadameriano.

La primera, tanto la interpretatio platónico-aristotélica, como la interpretatio hegeliana se han empeñado en mantener la controversia Heráclito-Parménides. Mientras que la primera los ve en una disputa por la estabilidad o el devenir, la segunda los comprende en un desarrollo dialéctico, aún más, que son superados y consumados en la síntesis hegeliana: "Heraklit—der Anfang, Hegel die Vollendung: so hat Hegel selbst die Bedeutung des Dunklen (6 σκοτεινός), wie Heraklit schon im altertum hieß, gesehen" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 32). Gadamer llama la atención sobre tal crítica por varias razones: no se conocían entre sí, al menos en su momento creativo, dada su ubicación geográfica y posible contemporaneidad; como se vio en Anaximandro, es más plausible un efecto de éste en Parménides, sobre todo en el fragmento 28BVIII, 53ss DK, que de Heráclito en el fragmento 28BVI DK donde se habla de las opiniones de los mortales y no la del Efesio; además, porque Parménides escribe en estilo épico, igual que Homero, no para disputar, sino para ser recitado. Una tercera perspectiva es la interpretatio Heidegger-Gadamer, la cual consiste en comprenderlos como quienes piensan en torno de lo *Uno y lo Mismo*, aunque no del mismo modo (Gadamer, 1985, p. 232; 2001, p. 17).

La segunda, tiene que ver con la síntesis que Gadamer presenta acerca de las interpretaciones más destacadas: mientras que Platón encuentra en Heráclito el planteamiento incipiente de la tarea que tomará como propia, la dialéctica de lo uno y múltiple, Aristóteles destaca del Efesio su cosmología del fuego, metáfora de la *phýsis* con la que se comprendía el orden y equilibrio de las cosas, pero que del estoicismo al cristianismo se interpreta como conflagración universal que juzga el viejo orden y funda uno nuevo. Luego Hegel encuentra en Heráclito el inicio de lo que en él es consumación: el espíritu, cuyo ser absoluto se cifra en el reunir en sí mismo la estabilidad del cambio y la unidad de los contrarios; finalmente Heidegger busca en el Efesio el anticipo de su pensar: aquello don-

de el desocultamiento acaece de un modo originario (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 232–233; 2001, pp. 18–19).

Como si fuera poco, al ya tradicional prejuicio sobre Heráclito que le califica como "el oscuro", Gadamer suma la dificultad que representa el *efecto* del surgimiento de la ciencia moderna, al punto que el método define la ciencia y la autoconciencia la filosofía en la Edad Moderna. Heráclito aparece en el horizonte histórico como aquél en quien está pensada, aunque no formulada ni tematizada, la estructura de la autoconciencia: el profundo *lógos* que el alma tiene (22B 45 DK). Esto es lo que Hegel parece advertir y declara retomar.

Como ya se ha dicho anteriormente, en los diálogos de Platón (1988a ,1988b) (*Teeteto* 152e ss; *Sofista* 242c, 242e; *Banquete* 187a), la interpretación de Heráclito se construye a partir de una tesis atribuida a él, cuyo acento ha sido puesto más sobre el fluir permanente de las cosas, que en la constancia del mismo rio como señala la metáfora; Heráclito aparece así a los ojos de Platón como el tipo contrario al parmenídeo en el que encuentra una anticipación del *eidos*. Platón parte, pues, desde Heráclito, contra Heráclito; salió mejor librado con Aristóteles (2003a), pues si bien no le tenía en gran estima por cuanto franqueaba el principio de no contradicción (*Metafísica*, Γ 3, 1005b 24), sí que le seguía en su comprensión de la naturaleza como aquello que en el moverse por sí mismo encuentra su equilibrio.

La tercera tiene que ver con el aspecto metodológico, sobre todo a partir de las contribuciones de Karl Reinhardt (1968) y que Gadamer resume en tres pasos: a) retrotraer la sentencia de Heráclito al contexto en el que ha sido citada; b) indagar los intereses del autor que cita al Efesio desentrañando el sentido que hubiese sido mentado; y c) advertir las incongruencias de la cita en relación con el sentido atribuido por quien lo cita. En todo caso, por un lado, es "lícito leer las citas de Heráclito en contra del sentido que le otorga el autor que lo cita, y reducirlas buscando una tensión de la forma que elimine la redacción del autor que lo cita" (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 233–234; 2001, pp. 19–20), y por el otro, no

se puede descartar que debido al "modo impreciso de citar y aludir que era común en la Antigüedad, más de una sentencia de Heráclito puede haber pasado desapercibida en las turbias mareas de los apologetas cristianos" (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 234; 2001, p. 20).

Gadamer llama la atención sobre varios fragmentos, más conocidos, aunque también muy complejos a la hora de comprender en ellos el núcleo del problema heraclíteo, según Gadamer: lo Uno y lo Mismo. En el caso específico de 22B 66 DK, el fuego es comprendido como una entidad que atrapa, juzga y devora todo. No obstante, si se tiene en cuenta que κρίνειν, además del sentido de juzgar, atrapar, aprisionar, también significa "«separar, discernir, distinguir»" y que καταλαμβάνειν significa, asir más que apresar (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 52; 2001, pp. 43–44), no sólo hay que interpretarlo en el sentido que el fuego deja ver todo como separado, sino también, a partir de las contribuciones de Reinhardt, "hay que buscar el enlace que existe entre el fuego y las profundas palabras que Heráclito dice sobre la psyché" (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 238–239; 2001, p. 27), en otras palabras, sobre la comprensión del fuego como lo Uno, subyacente a todos los fenómenos, en pertenencia mutua con el pensar. Gadamer proporciona dos ilustraciones al respecto: a) "la unidad heraclítea de fluir y detención", lámpara y flama, evaporación de la humedad de las almas (22B 12 DK), luz encendida en la noche (22B 26 DK) (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 239-240; 2001, p. 28); y b) "el fuego y el calor son en el fondo una y la misma cosa", calor y flama son modos de darse el fuego mismo, como lo son la vida y la conciencia (Gadamer, 1985, p. 240; 2001, p. 29). Lo que Gadamer pretende es destacar el automovimiento y la autorreferencialidad del fuego, de lo Uno. Para ello acude a pasajes de Platón (1988a; 1985; 1999) tales como Cármides, 168ess; Fedro; Leyes, X; y de Aristóteles (2003b) como en De ánima, Γ 2, en los que se da cuenta del movimiento que se mueve a sí mismo, pero sobre todo de la relación esencial entre el ver, oír y saber, es decir, no tanto del proceso psíquico de la percepción, sino fenomenológico del saber que se sabe. El fuego no sólo se inflama a sí mismo, desde su propio calor, sino que también lo hace de un

modo súbito como el rayo, es, en definitiva, "la experiencia enigmática del pensar, que se despierta de pronto y que luego vuelve a hundirse en lo oscuro" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 241; 2001, p. 30).

Para terminar con la indagación sobre la interpretación gadameriana de Heráclito tenemos los *Estudios heracliteos*. En primera instancia, tenemos una descripción sobre la significación filosófica de las interpretaciones de Heráclito, en segundo lugar, los problemas hermenéutico-filológicos a los que les dedica la mayor extensión. La directriz hermenéutica para Gadamer, que comparte con Hermann Fraenkel, es la paradoja, un juego de palabras en el que repentinamente cambia la dirección de comprensión y significado, si bien articulada por una unidad que despliega en ellos un juego especular, de tal modo que una dirección de sentido no se comprende sin la otra. Allí donde aparece "la sentencia paradójica, el símil, la proporción y también la analogía simétrica [estamos en Heráclito]" (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 53–54; 2001, pp. 46–47).

Algunos ejemplos más palmarios del modo como la paradoja pareciera ser un elemento constitutivo del "estilo" del pensar heraclíteo son los fragmentos 22B 48 y 114 DK. El primero reza: "Nombre del arco, vida, pero su hacer, muerte" (Diels y Kranz, 1990, p. 161; Gadamer, 1991b, p. 54; 2001, p. 46). Mientras que DK traducen ἔργον por Werk, Gadamer por Tun, es decir, los primeros ponen el acento en el sentido sustantivado del resultado, de lo obrado, el segundo en el sentido transitivo del obrar mismo. Ahora bien, para Gadamer, la clave de comprensión del fragmento se encuentra en la homofonía de la palabra βίος puesto que en ella se manifiesta la unidad de los contrarios vida-muerte (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 54; 2001, p. 46). Respecto a 22B 114 DK tenemos: "la homofonía de «común (gemeinsam)» (ξυνόν) y «los que razonan con sensatez (mit Vernunft)» (ξὺν νῷ) forma el juego de palabras y se dice algo con ello". Lo que tal juego indica es que, dado que la razón es común, lo común es racional (Diels y Kranz, 1990, p. 176; Gadamer, 1991b, p. 54; 2001, p. 46). Un tercer ejemplo sería la homofonía de ἔρως y ἔρις, que indica una "«disputa amorosa»", la cual sospecha Gadamer del fragmento 22B 80 DK y que apoya con

Aristóteles (1985), Ética Nicomáquea © 1, 1155b 4–6 y Ética Eudemia H 1, 1235a 25 (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 54; 2001, p. 46).

Si bien la interpretación de Gadamer no tiene una secuencia propia como en el caso de Heidegger, sí que es verdad que tiene una perspectiva propia. Como se verá a continuación, todo está orientado a defender la hipótesis del problema fundamental de Heráclito: lo Uno y lo Mismo. Mientras que bajo la perspectiva aristotélica-teofrástica el fragmento 22B 60 DK está interpretado como una circulación de los elementos, en la platónica-plotiniana aparece como un descenso del alma al cuerpo y de éste un ascenso a lo Uno, y en la perspectiva Heidegger-gadameriana el camino se muestra no sólo en relación con la amplitud de la vereda, sino como uno y el mismo, aunque sus direcciones y señales sean distintas, incluso contrapuestas, la apariencia de las diferencias es el acontecimiento del camino (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 54–55; 2001, pp. 47–48).

Así las cosas, de acuerdo con 22B 1 DK, el lógos es lo Uno y lo Mismo. Se manifiesta de múltiples modos, que, aunque siempre presente, siempre desapercibido (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 54–55, ver nota 29; 2001, pp. 49–50, ver nota 32) por los muchos, quienes escuchando o no, se quedan en la distinción, lo diverso y distinto, pero se les oculta lo que, siendo εν, es en ello mismo τὸ σοφόν, los muchos son como quienes duermen, que cuando despiertan olvidan sin experienciar lo soñado, así, "sus experiencias no tienen consecuencias" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 59; 2001, p. 52). Para Gadamer, "ἔν τὸ σοφόν (...) es la sentencia propia y originaria que Heráclito parece haber repetido muchas veces en su libro"; de ello dan cuenta los fragmentos 22B 32, 41, 50, 108 DK, como Zeus es la suprema divinidad, por ello querría llevar nombre de ente, pero dado que lo εν τὸ σοφόν es más que un dios, por ello no querría; es lo que gobierna todo lo diverso y distinto, pero a través de todo comprende lo Uno; por ello es tanto lo sabio como lo separado.

Otra de las paradojas que Gadamer encuentra en Heráclito es la enseñanza del "camino hacia el conocimiento y (...) a la vez el abismo que existe entre la verdad una y la incapacidad para aprender propia de los que se hallan enredados en la multiplicidad del delirar y del soñar humanos" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 59; 2001, p. 53). Los fragmentos 22B 73, 75, 89 DK llaman la atención al respecto. En ellos hay una crítica, no a los que duermen, sino a los que se vuelven, construyen, hablan y actúan *como* todo aquél que duerme, que no sólo olvida lo soñado, sino que no lo puede experienciar.

Pero aquello que hay que experienciar, en lo que hay que recogerse pensantemente es en la unidad de toda multiplicidad de contrarios. Unidad que no es la consecuencia de una "sucesión temporal", ni la "subitaneidad del tránsito", sino la simultaneidad que reside en el cambio. De los fragmentos 22B 21, 25, 20, 51, 10 y 8 DK, podemos resaltar que las contraposiciones tomadas en sí mismas como separadas y reales, sólo son meras visiones como las oníricas de los que duermen, "representan la ceguera (*Verblendung*), que consiste en no estar en condiciones de reconocer lo Uno y lo Mismo en todo lo múltiple que encontramos" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 61; 2001, p. 56); cuando son modos de darse lo Uno.

Agregando a lo anterior, de lo Uno no podemos dar cuenta como lo hacemos de cada uno de los contrarios en que acontece. Sin embargo, algunas imágenes vienen en nuestra ayuda cuando no hay concepto alguno: el río, el ciceón, la armonía, el arco y la lira, las cuales entrañan una *simultaneidad*. De esto tratan los fragmentos 22B 10, 51, 67, 57, 76, 62, 88 y 65 DK. Gadamer es enfático al considerar que, si bien hay fragmentos que hablan del "cambio como tal", en el caso de los presentes, se trata de "la unidad especulativa que reside en el cambio" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 63; 2001, p. 58). Esta unidad especulativa no es algo en lo que confluyen los contrarios, no es una síntesis, sino aquello en lo que tienen su coexistencia.

Sobre el cambio como tal y el aspecto cambiante de las cosas tenemos los fragmentos 22B 88, 62, 9, 61, 82, 83, 84, 24, 25, 27, 18, 53, 80, 29 DK. De una parte, mientras que la comprensión de lo joven y lo viejo es cuestión de perspectiva; la de la vida y la muerte—que en Platón (1988a) (Fedón 70dss y 103ass) estaba zanjada, explicada y asegurada por la inmortalidad del alma que permanece inalterable e idéntica en el cambio repentino o subitaneidad que supone el paso de la vida a la muerte, o la idea misma

de la oposición, o el ὑποκείμενον aristotélico—en Heráclito es una comprensión radical por cuanto no hay un ente inalterable que se mueva de aquí para allá, o fondo que permanezca como fundamento, sino la repentina manifestación del ser mismo, ya como vida, ya como muerte (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 68; 2001, p. 65). En ese mismo orden de ideas tenemos el mutuo vivir la muerte y morir la vida de dioses y hombres, que para Gadamer va más allá del comportamiento como espectadores (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 68; 2001, p. 65), pues lo que en definitiva se advierte es que la variabilidad y nulidad de ambos aspectos apuntan a lo Uno.

De la otra, en otros fragmentos se considera el aspecto cambiante y diverso de las cosas, y a pesar de ello, lo idéntico. Desperdicios y oro, salvador y mortal, bello y feo, sabio y necio, a primera vista parecen ser antitéticos, no obstante, en lo Uno coexisten. Esto Uno es aquello abierto en lo que la mayoría se encuentra, con lo que continuamente, mientras son, se las tienen que ver, pero aun así no lo reconocen (Cfr. 22B 17 y 72 DK). Para Gadamer, en Heráclito no hay algo así como una doctrina mistérica o escatológica (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 69–71; 2001, pp. 66–69), ya que su interlocutor no es alguien iniciado, sino la mayoría. El fragmento 22B 24 DK no indica entonces un culto a los héroes, sino la transformación súbita, al que en vida le temían en el campo de batalla ahora todos le honran, incluso le levantan monumentos. Esa transfiguración, que no tiene el sentido cristiano, está nombrada en el fragmento 22B 27 DK como aquello que ni se espera ni se imagina y en el 22B 18 DK como lo inesperado. La vida del ser humano se tensa entre la decisión y la espera. La decisión por lo Uno es el inicio de su reconocimiento, esperar lo inesperado, la posibilidad de su cumplimiento.

Además de ser comunidad de la decisión y la espera, también somos comunidad de lo justo y la disputa. Es a lo que Gadamer señala con la interpretación de 22B 53 y 80 DK, así como otros fragmentos ya referidos. πόλεμος no sólo muestra la identidad de las oposiciones, sino que también hace la apariencia de las cosas, el cambio de aspecto, en eso consiste su justicia y por eso Gadamer

los lee como lo "uno y lo mismo" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 70; 2001, p. 68). Agregando a lo anterior, Gadamer llama la atención sobre algo pocas veces advertido y sí muchas veces confundido. Los inmortales son los dioses, pero nunca el dios del 22B 67 DK, el Uno manifiesto de múltiples modos. Los inmortales se reconocen en virtud de los mortales, del mismo modo como, o precisamente porque, la inmortalidad llega sólo por la muerte. Por eso, la gloria y la inmortalidad o como se ha dicho antes, la transfiguración de los muertos se decide en virtud de la decisión por lo Uno (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 70; 2001, p. 68).

En cuanto a la articulación de todo esto con la cosmología del fuego, Gadamer encuentra que los fragmentos 22B 30, 89, 31, 90, 88, 67 DK pueden darnos indicios, sumado tanto a la caracterización que hace Platón del Efesio, como de la relación de Heráclito con la filosofía de su tiempo. Varias son las ideas que podemos destacar: la primera es que el problema de Heráclito no es tanto un asunto especial, sino el modo mismo de ver el mundo, por eso dice Gadamer: "no debe ser visto como un continuador de la cosmogonía jónica" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 72; 2001, p. 70) puesto que a su juicio esta cuestión es un asunto secundario y un esfuerzo de los doxógrafos posteriores; contra los milesios no exhibe una ciencia del todo, sino que indica la verdad siempre visible, aunque siempre ignorada. La segunda se deriva de la interpretación misma de los fragmentos, de los cuales pueden destacarse como cuestiones auténticamente heraclíteas las siguientes: κόσμον τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων es aquél ἕνα καὶ κοινὸν κόσμον al que se vuelven los despiertos y le dan la espalda los durmientes, la metáfora del πῦρ ἀείζωον hace referencia al orden cosmológico inalterable que mantiene o restablece el equilibrio y medida de todas las cosas en la subitaneidad del encenderse y apagarse, en lo que Gadamer encuentra un efecto de Anaximandro (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 72; 2001, p. 71). En ese mismo orden de ideas tenemos las πυρὸς τροπαί, "golpes del fuego que no cesa" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 72; 2001, p. 71), inversiones, transformaciones súbitas, en las que se entraña una comprensión del fuego no como un elemento visible y consistente, sino precisamente siempre en transformación, lo Uno que subyace a todo ser, πυρός τε ἀνταμοιβὴ, μεταπεσόντα, ἀλλοιοῦται. (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 73; 2001, p. 73).

Finalmente tenemos aquellos textos que tratan sobre el alma, principalmente 22B 12, 88, 26, 116, 46, 119, 43, 46, 131, 115 DK. Contra la interpretación estoica del enlazamiento de la teoría del flujo con la del alma, Gadamer conecta a ésta con la teoría del fuego, si se tiene en cuenta que, el fuego en Heráclito no es "un elemento al lado de otros", sino la vitalidad misma, el automovimiento sin calma, el auténtico enigma del ser no es cómo se conserva lo mismo en el acontecer, sino el ser mismo del cambio tenga lugar (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 75; 2001, p. 75). La cuestión fundamental para Heráclito, según Gadamer, no es, pues, la transición de lo Uno a lo Otro, sino la subitaneidad del πληγῆι (22B 11 DK) implícita en las expresiones τροπαί (22B 31 DK) ἀνταμοιβή (22B 90 DK), μεταπεσόντα (22B 88 DK), ἀλλοιοῦται (22B 67 DK), el έξαίφνης "instante" al que se referirá Platón (1988b) (Parménides, 156ce) y Aristóteles (1995), también mediante el võv "ahora" (Física, 222b 1ss).

Dice Gadamer: "La expresión espacial para tal alteridad sin transición es el entrar en contacto, prender (ἄπτεσθαι)" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 76; 2001, p. 76), también valdría la expresión ἀγχιβασίην, acercamientos (22B 122 DK). Si bien, en cuanto al fragmento 22B 26 DK, Clemente cita lo dicho por Heráclito teniendo a la vista la resurrección, dos cuestiones importantes, propiamente heraclíteas, advierte Gadamer: primera, las polaridades vigilia y sueño, vida y muerte, indican un acercamiento tal que no admiten una transición en la que se pierda su lejanía, sino una subitaneidad del cambio de lo uno en lo otro. El despierto y el dormido es el mismo, mas cuando está dormido aún no está ahí, sino que parece como un muerto; el vivo y el muerto son el mismo, mas cuando está muerto ya no está ahí, aunque parece dormido, esto es tan radical que no hay despertar. La segunda, "prender una luz", si bien menciona la polaridad del encender y apagar unidos en lo uno del fuego, pues lo que se enciende es fuego y lo que se apaga es fuego (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 76–77; 2001, p. 77), también el acontecimiento mismo del dar luz, y con ello calor, vida, aspecto, vigilia. Nótese bien que dice prende una luz, en una circunstancia específica, en la noche, mas no es la luz misma y mucho menos se trata de la luz diurna. Esto se articula con el alma en que gracias a la luz se puede ver, y tanto el despierto—"volver-en-si"—como el vivo—"estar-en-si"—mediante el pensamiento o conciencia corresponden a lo Uno recogiéndose en lo común. Aunque el fuego está tan entretejido con el alma (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 78; 2001, p. 79), para la mayoría pasa desapercibido. La luz es la posibilidad del acercamiento del hombre con el mundo, aún en la noche más oscura.

Volverse a un mundo privado mediante un pensamiento particular ἰδίαν φρόνησιν (22B 2 DK), la ὕβρις del 22B 43 DK y la presunción o "apreciación de sí mismo", la οἴησις a la que se refieren 22B 46 y 131 DK, son peligros que Heráclito advierte y como bien apunta Gadamer, más allá de la perspectiva epistemológica bajo la que aparece, sobre todo, en el sentido de δόξα que le atribuye Platón (1988a) (Fedón, 92a; Fedro, 244c), hay que comprenderlo principalmente desde el moral original, cuyo sentido encuentra apoyo en Eurípides y en el οἴομαι — "prever, presentir"—en Homero, pudiéndose así establecer una relación con el ἦθος del 22B 119 DK, pues la vida del ser humano no está forjada por los dioses, sino por el cuidado de sí mismo en su doble sentido del procurar y autocriticar (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 79–80; 2001, p. 81). De este modo, el pensamiento de Heráclito se corresponde más con la "sabiduría sentencial gnómica" que con la "ciencia jónica", y en tal sentido, la teoría del fuego está, según Gadamer, más relacionada con "la psyché y su lógos" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 80; 2001, p. 81); así, por ejemplo, el fragmento 22B 115 DK, el lógos del alma que se acrecienta a sí mismo, apunta a lo Uno, ese mismo βαθύν λόγον del que habla el 22B 45 DK.

Como breve conclusión podemos glosar cortamente dos citas de Gadamer: de una parte: "La «sabiduría una» de Heráclito no es cómo pasa lo Uno a lo Otro, sino que también sin tránsito sea ya lo otro" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 76; 2001, p. 76). Este gran logro de rescatar la

unidad dialéctica sin suponerla bajo un proceso dialéctico es quizá uno de los mayores aportes a la lectura contemporánea de Heráclito. De la otra tenemos: "De un modo inimitable, sostiene el centro único, que se le ha perdido a la reflexividad de la autoconciencia en el pensamiento moderno: ἄπτεται ἐαυτῷ" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 80; 2001, p. 82). Es decir, en lugar de la distinción res cogitans y res extensa, del interior que se sabe a sí mismo como lo más cierto y fuente de luz de todo exterior, Gadamer invita a reconocer que en el "sich (se)", el "Umschlag (vuelco)" de lo Uno en lo múltiple, es lo que Heráclito busca, aquella fuerza vital que coliga conciencia y ser, aquella manifestación que interpela al pensar a pensarse lo que está separado (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 80; 2001, p. 82).

## 6. Parménides, las opiniones de los mortales y el ser

Que el diálogo vivo con Parménides fue una constante en el pensamiento de Gadamer, lo atestiguan los textos que recogen sus interpretaciones a lo largo de algo más de cincuenta años. En el escrito de 1936, *El poema didáctico de Parménides*, encontramos ante todo una valoración del estado de la cuestión, sobre todo en Karl Reinhardt, y la recensión de la interpretación de Kurt Riezler (1882—1955) en su *Parmenides*.

En Hacia la prehistoria de la metafísica encontramos principalmente la exposición de la historia efectual del pensamiento eleático, a través de tres dimensiones, "rasgos «arcaicos» o problemas fundamentales": 1) el ser y el todo; 2) el todo y la parte, lo uno y lo múltiple; y 3) ser y pensar. Allí, Parménides aparece en el origen de la historia de la metafísica, por más que Aristóteles no hubiese podido encajarlo en su teoría de las cuatro causas (Física, A 2–3; Metafísica, A 5), tanto porque en aquél ya estaba planteado el problema metafísico en su totalidad, el ser, como por su crítica a la filosofía platónica en la que la filosofía eleática se efectúa (Gadamer, 1985, p. 12; 1992, p. 9), de tal modo que, tanto su interpretación como transmisión, estarán determinadas por la asimilación entre el ser parmenídeo y la idea platónica y por su crítica al pensamien-

to eleático, por el desconocimiento de la multiplicidad del sentido del ser.

Referente al ser y el todo, mientras que bajo las δόξαι βροτῶν el ser es lo que surge y cesa, es lo abarcado como globalidad del mundo, para Parménides τὸ ἐόν ni surge ni cesa, sino que es "siendo", "pura presencia", lo abarcante en sí mismo, "«en lo que» todo ser es" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 14; 1992, p. 12) y, por tanto, un continuo espacio-tiempo, "todo ser", sin ser algo espaciotemporal, nada ente, y, sin embargo, lo Ente; lo Uno y lo Mismo. Gadamer expone además que la historia efectuar Wirkungsgeschichte del pensamiento eleático se encuentra en el voῦς de Anaxágoras cuando lo comprende como lo más puro καθαρώτατον, sin mezcla μέμεικται οὐδενὶ, totalmente presente por sí mismo ἐόντα ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ, con poder sobre todo πάντων κρατεῖ, por tanto, a todo conoce πάντα ἔγνω, y en todo ente se tiene percepción γνώμην πάντὸς ἴσχει 59B 12 DK (Gadamer, 1985, p. 16; 1992, p. 14. Cfr. Diels y Kranz, 1959, pp. 37-38); en el ἄτομον de Demócrito toda vez que es pensado por este como lo verdaderamente ente τὸ ετεῆ ὄν 68B 9 y 125 DK (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 15, 25–26; 1992, pp. 14, 26–27. Cfr. Diels y Kranz, 1959, pp. 139 y 168). También Platón (1988a) (Fedro, 250c; Banquete, 211a) caracteriza sus Ideas con los rasgos del ser eleático: son siempre, sin surgimiento ni cesación, ὅλον, el respecto (Hinblick)—lo que estando delante por sí mismo y desde sí mismo da aspecto a cada ente en virtud de lo cual es pensado—es la Unitotalidad y presencia constante del ser parmenídeo (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 15–17; 1992, pp. 14–17). En Aristóteles (2003a) también encuentra Gadamer que a pesar de lo dicho en Metafísica Λ IV 1070b 16–19 sobre la presencia analógica de las cuatro causas en el ente, también en 1070b 34-35 encontramos lo que siendo primero de todo mueve a todo, lo que es por sí mismo presencia pura, ἐνέργεια ὄν (Gadamer, 1985, pp. 18–19 y 28–29; 1992, pp. 17–18 y 30–31).

En cuanto al problema del *todo y la parte, lo uno y lo múltiple*, surge de la comprensión del ser como presencia inmutable de la totalidad; el ser, Uno y Mismo, comprende lo múltiple. Dice Ga-

damer que "todos estos «signos» del Ser no provienen sino de lo que ellos excluyen: devenir y perecer, división y separación, movimiento y ausencia, lo vacío, lo ilimitado" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 19; 1992, p. 19). En el Parménides, Platón (1988b) retoma la cuestión interpelando a Zenón sobre la dialéctica de las autocontradicciones que supone la multiplicidad. La pretensión de mostrar lo Uno como múltiple y viceversa (Cfr. Filebo) tiene como consecuencia que lo ente devenga lo otro destruyendo lo Uno (Sofista 246c, Teeteto 157b, Hippias mayor 301b) contra lo cual Platón defiende el είδος. Si bien, Zenón desarrolla la dialéctica de totalidad y parte, y Platón, el problema de lo uno y múltiple, de acuerdo con Gadamer, es justamente Parménides quien enumera a la totalidad como uno de los indicios del ser y que Aristóteles (1995) en Física, III 6, 207a, la definirá también como aquello en lo cual nada falta ni sobra (Gadamer, 1985, p. 20; 1992, p. 20), lo cual no excluye que comprenda muchas partes. Es en diálogos como Filebo 14d (uno-parte), Sofista 244d ss (totalidad-unidad) y Parménides 130a ss (totalidad-parte), donde Platón (1988b, 1992) desarrolla el problema del uno-todo y que resuelve con la diaíresis de las Ideas. En Aristóteles (1995, 2003a) también encontramos la cuestión de la parte-todo, no sólo en un sentido material, sino también en los elementos de una definición (Física 207a 26 y Metafísica \Delta 25, 1023b 22, Λ 10, 1075a 15–24).

Respecto al ser y pensar, Gadamer advierte que, contra una interpretación idealista del pensar, el voɛv es, ante todo, un signo del ser, pues "con el ser está siempre presente lo que a él le es presente: «el pensar» (Gadamer, 1985, p. 24; 1992, p. 25) y de una comprensión lógica de la verdad como concordancia del juicio, la verdad es el desocultamiento o ser-manifiesto del ser o Presencia. Es necesario destacar que, mientras en la interpretación idealista, el voɛv de 28B VIII, 35 DK es tomado como voz pasiva—ser pensado—Gadamer lo toma en su voz activa -pensar-: "pues no sin el Ser, en el que se expresa, hallarás el pensar" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 25; 1992, pp. 25–26). La importancia que esto reviste tiene su alcance en la subjetividad moderna, de lo cual toma como ejemplo

el *Parmenidesstudien* de Fränkel, donde se afirma que el ser se expresa en el pensar cuando es todo lo contrario, puesto que, como se ha dicho, el pensar, "es siempre un testimonio del ser" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 25; 1992, p. 26). Así mismo, el fragmento 28B VI, 1 DK se ha interpretado como es necesario decir y pensar que el ser es; Gadamer por su parte lo comprende en los siguientes términos: "lo que se puede decir y pensar es" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 25; 1992, p. 26), puesto que el pensar mismo es signo y testimonio del ser. En definitiva, es propio de la teoría de la percepción presocrática hacer "aparecer en el ser mismo el ser-perceptor" (Gadamer, 1985, p. 25; 1992, p. 26), comprendiendo lo *uno* a partir de, en relación con, y dejando ser, lo *otro*.

Para terminar, expongamos las ideas e interpretaciones encontradas en *Parménides y las opiniones de los mortales*; *Parménides y el ser*. En términos generales, en estos textos se trata de la supuesta controversia Heráclito-Parménides, los puntos de referencia del pensamiento parmenídeo, y la interpretación del *Poema* que, contrario al modo acostumbrado—Proemio, verdad, opiniones—subraya las cuestiones fundamentales del proemio y de éste salta al tránsito de la primera parte, sobre la verdad, a la segunda, sobre las opiniones. Con ello, Gadamer quiere apostar por un modo renovado de interpretación que toma distancia con las interpretaciones canónicas, tanto la platónico-aristotélica como la historicista, toda vez que el hombre tiene una cabeza de Jano que con un rostro mira a las opiniones y con el otro a la verdad.

Sobre la controversia Heráclito-Parménides sólo se pretende llamar la atención una vez más sobre los argumentos expuestos por Gadamer. El primero está referido al estilo del texto: si bien, el fragmento 28B VI, 8–9 DK pareciera apuntar al 22B 51 DK, dado que el estilo del texto es el épico, la intencionalidad no es la de polemizar con otro, en este caso con Heráclito. Aún más, el proemio del *Poema* reproduce la estructura del proemio de la *Teogonía* de Hesíodo (Gadamer, 1999, p. 115). El segundo tiene que ver con la opinión de los mortales, la βροτῶν δόξας de 28B I, 30 DK, los βροτοὶ de 28B VI, 4 DK o las δόξας βροτείας de 28B VIII, 51 DK.

Este es el blanco de la crítica parmenídea, pues βροτοὶ, en el estilo épico, se usa como sinónimo de hombres para aludir a su destino común (Gadamer, 1999, p. 114) y, en todo caso, no en una argumentación crítica en la que Heráclito estaría detrás.

En cuanto a los puntos de referencia del pensamiento parmenídeo, para Gadamer no hay más que las concepciones jónicas sobre el universo, particularmente la de Anaximandro. Por un lado, ante las múltiples oposiciones de sus predecesores, Parménides establece los opuestos de la luz y tinieblas como decisivos a la hora de comprender el orden del universo y aspecto de las cosas. Por el otro, sabemos que Anaximandro habría dicho que los entes se ajustan entre sí, unos a otros, ἀλλήλοις, según leemos en 12B 1 DK. Ahora bien, la interpretación tradicional de 28B VIII, 53-54 DK (Diels y Kranz, 1960, p. 239), que comprende dichos versos como que una de las formas de la realidad, esto es, el  $\alpha i\theta$   $\epsilon \rho i ov$   $\epsilon v$ . 56) y la νύκτ' ἀδαῆ (v. 59), no era necesaria, es según Gadamer una interpretación errónea, toda vez que, de una parte, «una de éstas», «una de las dos» se dice en griego ἐτέραν, mientras que allí encontramos la expresión μίαν, esto es, "la unicidad, la reducción a la unidad de lo que es doble", nombrado en la expresión τάντία forma de τὰ εναντία, los contrarios u opuestos (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 11; 1999, p. 121); de la otra, en contraste con la expresión χρῆν del fragmento 28B I, 32 DK, ella no quiere decir tanto "es necesario (es ist notwendig)" en el sentido de indispensable, sino más bien "es debido considerar (es ist als notwendig anzusehen)", y explica, "es propio y legítimo (es ist in Ordnung und richtig)" (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 11) de todo ser humano estar expuesto tanto a la luz como a la noche, a la verdad como a la falsedad. A lo anterior, Gadamer le suma que también en el v. 56 encontramos la expresión χωρίς ἀπ' άλλήλων, separados (sus signos) unos de otros, en la que también encontramos resonancias de Anaximandro. En definitiva, lo que está en defensa es la mutua pertenencia de los opuestos, que en el caso de Parménides son luz-tinieblas, como condición de manifestación o encubrimiento del ser (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 11; 1999, pp. 121-122).

Finalmente, respecto a la interpretación del *Poema*, como ya hemos anticipado, parte del *Proemio* para pasar luego al punto donde la primera parte, sobre la *verdad*, se relaciona y articula con la segunda, sobre las *opiniones*, terminando con la interpretación de los fragmentos que se refieren a la verdad. El tema que se anuncia en el *Proemio* se desarrolla en dos partes, del que el fragmento 28B VIII, 50–52 DK resulta ser para Gadamer, y en esto sigue a Karl Reinhardt, el punto en el que "aparecen con gran claridad la relación recíproca entre ambos aspectos y la articulación del todo" (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 10–11; 1999, p. 119). Es decir, se justifica tanto la tesis de la inseparabilidad verdad-opiniones, como se señala el ámbito especular en el que aparecen.

Ahora bien, los primeros versos de la segunda parte del Poema son 28B VIII, 53-54 DK, de los que ya se hizo una síntesis del análisis gadameriano y del que sólo agregaremos ahora lo siguiente: "[...] esto representa una polémica acerca del devenir del mundo que aparece en la filosofía de los milesios" (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 11-13; 1999, p. 120). Prueba de ello son los versos 28B VIII, 55-59 DK, en los que se señala los opuestos luz-tinieblas: el fuego, por cuanto es ἤπιον—manso, amigo, benévolo, útil—estable y homogéneo, idéntico a sí mismo, porque no se mezcla con otro elemento, manifiesta el ser, Gadamer incluso ve en él al "corazón inmóvil de la verdad"; la noche, por densa y pesada lo encubre. De dichos fragmentos se extraen tres conclusiones decisivas: a) más que por cualquiera otros, el universo está constituido por los opuestos luz-tinieblas que se pertenecen mutuamente, b) con lo cual se supera a los jónicos, y c) de la manifestación u ocultación del ser depende su conocimiento (Gadamer, 1999, p. 122), de lo cual hablan los fragmentos 28B III, VI, 1, VIII, 34–36 y XVI DK, y con los cuales ya nos encontramos con la interpretación de los fragmentos que se refieren a la verdad, en los que se identifican ser y voεĩv, verbo cuya voz activa apunta, en principio, no a "qué es", sino "que hay", se da algo como presente y por tanto un percibir, porque hay, se da algo, lo percibo como algo, esto es otro modo de decir la inseparabilidad de ser y pensar, allende a la relatividad del

percibir se da la estabilidad del ser (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 17–22; 1999, p. 123).

Respecto a 28B II DK, Gadamer señala que su interpretación se hace difícil toda vez que en contraste con 22B VI DK, en el que no se indican dos caminos, sino tres y que los partidarios de la polémica Heráclito-Parménides utilizarían para fundamentarla desde el mismo *Poema*, pero como ya ha sido aclarado, el punto de mira de Parménides son las βροτοὶ de 28B VI, 4 DK, que también aparecen en 28B I, 30 DK βροτῶν δόξας, y 28B VIII, 51 DK δόξας βροτείας. En todo caso, 28B II DK gana claridad si se tiene en cuenta que ἔστιν no es copulativo sino existencial, equivale tanto a "que es", como a "que sea" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 132).

Si el μὴ ἐόν no se puede indagar, ni comunicar, se debe, de acuerdo con Gadamer, a la identidad de ser y vosív, de la que inmediatamente habla tanto el fragmento 28B III DK como 28B VI, 1, VIII, 34-36 y XVI DK (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 17-22; 1999, p. 133). Además de lo anteriormente dicho de ἔστιν, también hay que tener en cuenta que, contra lo que Heidegger pretendió en un principio, τὸ αὐτὸ no es sujeto—sobre lo que se dice—sino predicado—lo que se dice—de percibir-pensar y ser. Del fragmento 28B IV DK, Gadamer nos proporciona tres ideas: primera, considera una aproximación de Parménides a cuestiones tales como el devenir y la relación identidad-diferencia que aún no estaban acuñados, y que incluso Platón en el Sofista, 252d 6-7 y 10, 255ab, 256b 6-7, sólo se refiere a la cuestión en términos de «stasis» y «génesis», «quietud» y «nacimiento» (Gadamer, 1991b, p. 23; 1999, p. 134); segunda, insiste en el βεβαίως en tanto indica que no puede haber vacilación, considerando el aparecer de lo ausente desde el no-ser, pues lo ausente es un modo de presencia, aunque no está manifiesto, sino oculto, existe; y tercera, la continuidad y unidad del ente, toda vez que τὸ ἐὸν no se separa de τοῦ ἐόντος, es la anticipación del concepto de lo Uno, del ente en su cohesión y unidad, en su ser (Gadamer, 1999, p. 134). Así, el fragmento 28B V DK resulta ser una consecuencia de todo lo anterior.

El fragmento 28B VI DK, pasa por ser la respuesta a la cuestión de la verdad. También aquí nos recuerda Gadamer el sentido existencial de ἔστι, que expresa tanto el ser como su potencialidad, y lo mismo dice de τὸ ἐὸν, la inseparabilidad del ser, decir y pensar, pues, en definitiva, "la presencia del ser es justamente su percepción" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 136). Una de las ideas claves de este fragmento poco conocidas, que se enfrenta a la tesis del historicismo que hace pasar a Heráclito como blanco de ataques en la mención del tercer camino, por cuanto se le atribuye considerar idénticos ταὐτὸν y οὖκ ταὐτόν, es la de Gadamer cuando explica que el tercer camino no es más que la descripción del segundo, del «no es», pues mientras que en 28B II DK, en la perspectiva de la verdad, el segundo camino se le muestra a Parménides como inescrutable, en la perspectiva de los βροτοί, los hombres errantes y erráticos, entran en contradicción al considerar lo ausente como inexistente y decir al mismo tiempo es y no es. Un último detalle del fragmento 28B VI, 1 DK tiene que ver con el procedimiento de la repetición como recurso mnemotécnico para el rapsoda y el oyente (Gadamer, 1999, p. 138).

Luego, en los fragmentos 28B VII y VIII DK viene la presentación de las evidencias, que son los signos del ser, por los cuales queda argumentado que el ser sea, no así el no-ser. El conocimiento del ser no llega por una lengua ligera, un ojo ávido de novedad de los entes y un oído ensordecido por el ruido, como en el caso de los βροτοὶ, sino por el discernimiento de los signos, señales o mojones que se encuentran en el camino, en los que el ser se da. Las múltiples señales del ser apuntan a lo que éste es: lo Uno y lo Mismo, y en su automanifestarse acontece su percepción, pues no es que el ser se encuentra en el pensar, sino que el pensar pertenece al ser, es uno de sus signos, se da el ser, se da al pensar (Gadamer, 1991b, pp. 18–24; 1999, pp. 140–143).

#### 7. Conclusiones

Como queda expuesto, el aporte de Gadamer es fundamental en la comprensión de los presocráticos, toda vez que, con rigurosos conocimientos filológicos y profundas interpretaciones filosóficas, logra superar tanto el esquematismo de las traducciones de Diels y Kranz, así como neutralizar los excesos de Nietzsche y Heidegger. Estos hallazgos inauguran una nueva posibilidad de relectura de los presocráticos, especialmente los pensadores iniciales a los que nos hemos dedicado. Aún más, aunque gestó el ejercicio de comprender a los pre-socráticos desde Platón y Aristóteles, también es cierto que insinúa una comprensión del Ateniense y del Estagirita como efectuales de aquellos, estableciendo así un círculo virtuoso de interpretación filosófica.

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# CHAPTER XIV / CAPÍTULO XIV

# A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE PÓLIS? ETHICS, DIALECTIC AND HERMENEUTICS IN GADAMER'S EARLY INTERPRETATION OF PLATO

Facundo Bey

#### **RESUMEN**

Este capítulo examina la temprana interpretación gadameriana de Platón, centrándose en su obra de 1931 *Platos dialektische Ethik*, para demostrar cómo su comprensión de la dialéctica platónica como teoría de la posibilidad objetiva del diálogo marcó un decisivo distanciamiento filosófico respecto de Heidegger. A través de un análisis detallado de la lectura fenomenológica que Gadamer hace del *Filebo* y su concepción de la *pólis*, el estudio revela cómo su temprano compromiso con la filosofía platónica sentó las bases para su posterior desarrollo de la hermenéutica filosófica. La investigación se centra en tres temas interconectados: la relación entre dialéctica y hermenéutica, la naturaleza de la comprensión ético-política y el

significado del diálogo genuino en la finitud humana. El capítulo argumenta que la interpretación gadameriana de la *areté* y su concepción de la *pólis* como modo mundano de ser del ser humano lo llevaron a desarrollar una posición filosófica distintiva donde la dimensión ético-política de la comprensión emerge a través del diálogo con otros. Esta temprana divergencia respecto de la filosofía heideggeriana—particularmente en relación con los conceptos de *Miteinandersein* y finitud humana—resultó crucial para el subsiguiente desarrollo filosófico de Gadamer. El estudio demuestra cómo el encuentro inicial de Gadamer con Platón ya contenía el germen de una concepción dialógica de la comprensión que moldearía fundamentalmente su pensamiento maduro mientras iluminaba las implicaciones políticas de su ruptura con Heidegger.

Palabras clave: Gadamer, Platón, dialéctica, hermenéutica filosófica, filosofía política.

### **ABSTRACT**

This chapter examines Gadamer's early interpretation of Plato, focusing on his 1931 work *Platos dialektische Ethik*, to demonstrate how his understanding of Platonic dialectic as the theory of dialogue's objective possibility marked a decisive philosophical departure from Heidegger. Through a detailed analysis of Gadamer's phenomenological reading of the *Philebus* and his conception of the *pólis*, the study reveals how his early engagement with Platonic philosophy laid the groundwork for his later development of philosophical hermeneutics. The investigation centres on three interconnected themes: the relationship between dialectic and hermeneutics, the nature of ethico-political understanding, and the significance of genuine dialogue in human finitude. The chapter argues that Gadamer's interpretation of areté and his conception of the pólis as the mode of being of 'worldly' human beings led him to develop a distinctive philosophical position where the ethico-political dimension of understanding emerges through dialogue with others. This early divergence from Heideggerian philosophy—particularly regarding the concepts of *Miteinandersein* and human finitude—proved crucial for Gadamer's subsequent philosophical development. The study demonstrates how Gadamer's initial confrontation with Plato already contained the seeds of a dialogical conception of understanding that would fundamentally shape his mature thought while illuminating the political implications of his break with Heidegger.

**Keywords:** Gadamer, Plato, dialectic, philosophical hermeneutics, political philosophy.

I was trying to do something different at that time, something that Heidegger could not do at all, and this emerged from my book, Plato's Dialectical Ethics, which served as my Habilitation thesis. I was trying to reach philosophy through different paths, specifically through the path of practical knowledge. [...] the decisive step had already been taken in the fact that, from that moment, even if I had wanted to follow Heidegger, I could no longer have agreed with him. (Gadamer, 2002, p. 23)<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

Gadamer's early engagement with Plato and the concept of pleasure began with his 1922 doctoral thesis, Das Wesen der Lust nach den platonischen Dialogen [The Essence of Pleasure According to the Platonic Dialogues]. This dissertation, achieved by Gadamer with Nicolai Hartmann's support and Paul Natorp's supervision, addressed the concept of hedoné (pleasure) in Plato, exploring its relationship with the good (agathón), truth (alétheia), and happiness (eudaimonía). It described pleasure as an immediate, ephemeral, and subjective

<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

reality, bound to the present moment, yet lacking intrinsic value outside its relationship with good objects. The text examined how Plato distinguishes between subjective pleasure (aisthesis) and its integration into an objective structure of good and happiness, emphasising that something can be truly good only for the good man. Gadamer addressed the epistemological and ethical tensions surrounding pleasure in dialogues such as the *Theaetetus*, the *Philebus*, and the *Laws*, concluding that pleasure can become part of the "just order" (kósmos dikaíos) only when aligned with the supreme good. Finally, he indicated the influence of Plato's aporetic rigour on Aristotle, who also addressed these fundamental questions.

By the late 1920s, whilst Gadamer's scholarly endeavours had shifted towards an examination of Aristotelian ethics, his intellectual journey took another decisive turn when he embarked upon writing an introduction to the concept of hedoné in Platonic ethics—particularly as elaborated in the Philebus—for his Habilitation thesis, Interpretation des Platonischen Philebos [Interpretation of Plato's Philebus]. As Dostal remarks, "the habilitation concerns itself not so much with the proximity of Aristotle and Plato but with the unity of Plato's written work" (Dostal, 2010, p. 26).

In 1929, under the joint guidance of Martin Heidegger and Paul Friedländer, Gadamer obtained his *venia legendi* in philosophy. From this moment on, Gadamer began to substantially revise his work, drawing upon philosophical insights he had acquired and refined through his attendance at various seminars from 1928, most notably those conducted by Friedländer<sup>3</sup>. This thorough reconceptualisation would ultimately materialise as his first published volume: *Platos dialektische Ethik. Phänomenologische Interpretationen zum* 

<sup>2</sup> Key examples are the essays "Der aristotelische Protreptikos und die entwicklungsgeschichtliche Betrachtung der aristotelischen Ethik" [1928] and "Praktisches Wissen" [1930].

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer's relationship with Friedländer extended over 30 years following the former's Habilitation. Their extensive correspondence, rich in references to ancient texts, particularly Plato, took place between 1931 and 1961 and is preserved in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach. Notably, in his letter of 27.09.1931, Friedländer begins with an affectionate "Liebe Freund Gadamer."

Philebos [Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations of the Philebus] (1931). This book, rather than marking a shift in Gadamer's thought, represented a crucial 'return' to his foundational questions. It would fundamentally shape his exploration of how theoretical contemplation and practical knowledge mutually reinforce philosophical inquiry, setting the course for his subsequent philosophical development<sup>4</sup>.

The central question of the *Philebus* might be summarised thus: what characterises the best life, the fullest existence for human beings: the life of thought or that of pleasure? However, as Gadamer later clarified, this is not a confrontation between two theses but rather an opposition between two basic conceptions that are vital and inseparable for human beings, where choosing only one is impossible: "We are thus faced with an opposition that is no opposition, and the issue is how to measure out both ways to live and life defined by their cooperation" (1997, p. 434). The *Philebus* is unique for Gadamer since, according to him, "[...] *only* the *Philebus*, out of all Plato's literary works," presents "the origin and context of meaning of the unity between dialogue and dialectic" (GW 5, p. 14; original emphasis)<sup>5</sup>.

As Robert Dostal demonstrates, Gadamer's interpretation of the *Philebus* was significantly shaped by his critical engagement with Werner Jaeger's developmental reading of Aristotle. Where Jaeger saw discontinuity between Plato and Aristotle, Gadamer's interpretation revealed profound continuities, particularly regarding their understanding of practical knowledge and the good life (Dostal, 2010, pp. 24-26). The intricate relationship between philosophy and politics—a theme that would later become central to Gadamer's thought—first emerged in his 1928 essay *Dea aristotelische Protreptikos und die entwicklungsgeschicht-liche Betrachtung der aristotelischen Ethik* [The Aristotelian Protrepticus from the Perspective of the Historical Development Treatment of Aristotelian Ethics]. In that essay, Gadamer boldly challenged the philological interpretation of Aristotle that Werner Jaeger, already an established scholar, had proposed in Aristoteles, Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung (1923). See Bey 2019.

Niall Keane remarks how Heidegger had already underscored the fundamental role of relationality (pros ti) in Plato's ontology in his 1924–25 Sophist lectures, reading the "communion" (koinōnia) of the megista genē as structurally expressive of Dasein's Miteinandersein. As Keane writes, "Plato's articulation of the so-called highest kinds already attests both to the relational manifold of being itself, and, importantly, to what Heidegger terms human Dasein's relational 'being-together-with' or 'being-withone-another' (Miteinandersein)" (2010, p. 171). Gadamer's emphasis on dialectic as a

The book's general aim, as indicated by the author himself, was to highlight the horizon of Platonic philosophy through conceptual explanation, seeking to approach "things themselves" [die Sachen Selbst] as they appear in Platonic discourse (GW 5, p. 138). The dialogue's main connection to the Aristotelian problem of ethical science is established through the specific content and methodological approach used to dialectically analyse the relationship between epistēmē and hēdonē (GW 5, p. 6).

In the first chapter, Gadamer sought to demonstrate how Platonic dialectic underlies the effective possibility of dialogue. The second chapter, however, is structured around examining how Platonic dialectics can address the problem of ethics without allowing Plato's broader ontological position—the theory of Forms—to overshadow his investigation of the good for human life (GW 5, p. 6).

Gadamer's interpretative task was really ambitious: while the first part resorts to few textual citations or none, as it aimed not for explicit confirmations from Platonic dialogues but rather a broader understanding of Plato, the second part maintains constant engagement with the *Philebus* to avoid relying on established interpretations (GW 5, pp. 158–159). The few cited authors were Julius Stenzel,<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Solmsen, Paul Natorp, and Werner Jaeger.

Gadamer summarised his phenomenological approach across three prefaces to *Platos dialektische Ethik*. In the 1931 first edition, he defined his task as bringing "the things themselves [*die Sachen selbst*], which Plato discusses, freshly into view, in order to delineate the horizon of Platonic philosophizing through their conceptual explication" (GW 5, p. 158). There he acknowledged Heidegger's significant influence: "What the author owes to Martin Heidegger's teach-

dialogical structure can thus be read as a radical, consistent and meticulous development rather than a rejection of these phenomenological premises.

<sup>6</sup> Julius Stenzel recognised the book's uniqueness in an early laudatory review (1932). The book met a different reception in France, where H.-D. Simonin, scholar of Thomistic love theory, while acknowledging the discussion's "originality of thought," questioned this "Heidegger student's way of understanding Plato" (1932, p. 591).

ing and research is revealed in many many references, both explicit and tacit, to his work *Being and Time*, and even more in the overall methodological stance that seeks to develop what was learned and, above all, to make it fruitful through new applications" (GW 5, p. 159). In the 1967 second edition preface, he added that his "aim was really nothing other than to apply the newly learned art of phenomenological description to a Platonic dialogue" (GW 5, p. 159). Finally, in the 1982 preface to the first edition's reprint, he would summarise the intellectual challenge this work had represented:

I felt like a first reader of Plato, attempting to try out on a classical text the new immediacy of thinking access 'to the things themselves,' which was the watchword of Husserlian phenomenology. The fact that I dared, then, to do this, was due, primarily, to the deep and decisive influence that Martin Heidegger's academic teaching during his Marburg years had exercised upon me. In the force and radicalism of the questioning with which the young Heidegger fascinated his listeners lived on, not least, a phenomenological inheritance: an art of description devoted to phenomena in their concreteness, which avoided as far as possible both the learned airs of guild scholarship and traditional technical language, thereby achieving that things themselves pressed formally upon one. Should it not also be possible for me to see Greek philosophy, Aristotle and Plato, with new eyes—just as Heidegger was able in his lectures on Aristotle to present a wholly unfamiliar Aristotle, one in whom one rediscovered contemporary questions in surprising concreteness? (GW 5, p. 161)

#### 2. Dialectic and Hermeneutics

Gadamer begins his book resorting to the *Seventh Letter* to advance a crucial argument: the philosopher's existential ideal—a life devoted to pure theoretical contemplation—should not be understood as "außerstaatliches" [extra-political], nor does it entail an abandonment of *praxis*. Rather, praxis here encompasses, though is not limited to, an active engagement with matters pertaining to the *pólis* (GW 5, pp. 5–6).

The Seventh Letter, key to Gadamer's investigations, offers compelling testimony that Platonic philosophy assumes its political character through two foundational experiences: Plato's transformative relationship with Socrates and the Athenian pólis's fateful rejection of the latter. Philosophy thus emerges as what Gadamer terms an Umweg [detour]—a deliberate deviation from the established orientations of the Athenian pólis, yet one that never wholly abandons the fundamental path of political engagement. In Gadamer's eyes, this philosophical reorientation proves so profound that it modified Plato's understanding of the "echten politischen Aufgabe" [genuine political task]. From this point forward, Plato's political paradigm would be found in the disquieting presence of Socrates and his refutations (GW 5, p. 6). This interpretation of the Seventh Letter's political implications provides essential context for understanding Gadamer's subsequent analysis of the Republic.

This understanding is crucial for grasping another of Gadamer's guiding presuppositions, one that would shape both his book and his subsequent writings on the "sophistic and Platonic theory of the State" (GW 1, p. 489)—notably in *Plato und die Dichter [Plato and the Poets*] [1934] and *Platos Staat der Erziehung [Plato's Educational State*] [1942]: "Plato's *Republic* is not an edifice of constitutional reforms that, like other proposals for political reform, is meant to have a directly political effect, but rather an educational state [*Staat der Erziehung*]" (GW 5, p. 6)<sup>7</sup>.

Gadamer's reading, in my opinion, emerges specifically as a critical response to Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's dismissal of the utopian character of Plato's thought. While Wilamowitz rejected any comparison to Thomas More's "superfluous fantasies," arguing that "Plato was sacredly serious about his reform," Gadamer's early work already suggested a more nuanced understanding of the Republic's philosophico-political project. For Gadamer, the dialogue's power lay precisely in its resistance to being reduced to either mere fantasy or direct political programme. See Wilamowitz 1919 (p. 4). This theoretical position was further refined through Gadamer's engagement will Julius Stenzel's work. In his 1932 review of Stenzel's interpretation, Gadamer criticized what he termed an "apologetic attitude" towards certain passages of the Republic (GW 5, p. 218). Where Stenzel sought to defend the practicality of Plato's proposals, Gadamer insisted on understanding the text's "dialectical metaphors" as operating at a more fundamental level. The State described in the Republic was, for this early Gadamer,

Insofar as this dialogue seeks to establish new foundations for constructing a genuine State—one whose primary characteristic would be its educational function—its central aim becomes the formation of individuals capable of discovering such foundations. This formation must proceed from the Socratic insight regarding the impossibility of establishing any foundation that does not accept questions or resists the penetrating force of the philosophical phármakon.

The introduction to the *Philebus* commentary, beginning with its reference to the *Republic*, reveals the inseparability of ethics and politics in Gadamer's interpretation—a relationship that demands careful elucidation. In very general terms, for Gadamer, ethics constitutes a concrete public understanding of existence within which human action unfolds. As we will see, this reading is closely aligned with his characterisation of *areté*, <sup>8</sup> which encompasses what is traditionally designated by *éthos*. Additionally, Gadamer's distinctive interpretation of Plato suggests that the ethical situation—understood through the notion of *ēthos* or character<sup>9</sup>

primarily a "State in words" or a "State in thought" (GW 5, pp. 194, 196), whose significance lay not in its potential implementation but in its power to illuminate the relationship between philosophical dialogue and existential-political understanding. This interpretation was already evident in Gadamer's early reception of Kurt Singer's work on Plato. Singer's emphasis on the ambiguity and enigmatic character of Platonic writing provided Gadamer with a framework for understanding how philosophical texts could engage with political questions without reducing themselves to direct prescriptions. The *Republic* thus emerged in Gadamer's early thought as a myth that transcended questions of mere feasibility, operating instead as a dialectical exercise in political thinking (GW 5, p. 214). See Bey 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Gadamer's early conceptualisation of areté must be understood through his critical engagement with Hartmann's phenomenology of values. By 1931, Gadamer had already developed a distinctive interpretation that deliberately departed from the traditional Latin appropriation of areté as virtus. Instead, he emphasized its intrinsic connection to the notion of Rechenschaftsgabe (a demand for accountability), thereby establishing an essential link between virtue and dialogical reasoning. This interpretation emerged from his careful reading of Singer's Platon, der Gründer (1927), which Gadamer praised as "truly hermeneutic" (GW 5, p. 214) in its approach to understanding Platonic politics.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer was aware of the classical distinction between ἔθος (éthos) and ἦθος (êthos), as discussed by both Plato (Leg. 792e) and Aristotle (EN, 1103a). Cf. GW 5 (p. 242).

—serves as the starting point for dialectic as psychic movement, initiated through dialogue with others.

The book, divided into two chapters which "do not form a whole," establishes from the outset three important points of departure for understanding both its specific content and this early development of Gadamer's thought on the path toward formulating his philosophical hermeneutics. Firstly, Gadamer warns that the title should not create in the reader unfounded illusions, as the book "promises no answer," but instead "it poses a question: in what sense Platonic dialectic poses, or even can pose, the problem of *ethics*." Secondly, he clarifies that "the claim here is not that Platonic "ethics" is dialectical but rather an inquiry into whether and how Platonic dialectic is "ethics"." Thirdly, Gadamer presents the hypothesis guiding his original interpretation and which will later underpin his own philosophy: "Plato's theory of *dialectic* is, in fact, the theory of the objective possibility [*sachlichen Möglichkeit*] of *dialogue*" (GW 1, p. 158; original emphasis).

In Gadamer's reading, dialectic emerges not merely as a method of philosophical investigation but as the very process through which ethical and political understanding becomes possible. This dialectical movement operates at multiple levels: within the individual soul, between citizens, and in the broader political community. Dialectic, in its theoretical investigation of the good, disrupts the cemetery-like peace imposed by dogmatic norms through mere habituation. Instead, it fosters an understanding of human beings as entities who never fully possess or master themselves, and whose highest possibil-

In a 1989 article published in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (No. 112, May 17) titled Platos dialektische Ethik – beim Wort genommen, later published in GW 7 (pp. 121–127), Gadamer argues: "The formula 'dialectical ethics' indicated an intention that persisted throughout the entirety of my later work. [...] The question I posed to myself was how one could speak of an ethics in relation to Plato's adoption of the Socratic question and his dialectic. [...] The Socratic dialogue and the Socratic question concerning the good formed the lifeworld background from which Plato could call philosophy 'dialectic' at all. I attempted to make this lifeworld background speak anew in 1920s Germany" (GW 7, p. 123).

ity manifests in the experience of finitude, in the limit, which rather than presenting an obstacle, opens the possibility for the emergence of the self as other and for encountering others within one-self—all as multiple facets of a single *pólis*. It is precisely in this sense that dialectic assumes its ethical character and, as Richard Sullivan aptly observes, we can consequently further argue that dialectic "is also political" (1989, p. 143). This "ethico-political inquiry"—which unfolds within the realm of existence and concerns both the construction of an authentic State and the formation of citizens capable of guiding the *pólis* in harmony with the idea of the Good<sup>11</sup>—is inextricably bound to the cultivation of *areté*. Accordingly, *areté* must be understood in its dual nature: as both "human possibility of existence and existential intelligibility" (GW 5, p. 6).

In Gadamer's reading of Socratic-Platonic philosophy, as in Socratic-Aristotelian philosophy, human existence in its facticity, along with the concepts of *areté* and *tó agathón*, are never examined *eo ipso*, but rather through their determinate relations to something else<sup>12</sup>—something that constitutes neither their opposite nor their mere absence:

The Socratic question of what *arete* is (or a specific *arete*) is guided, thus, by a preliminary concept of *arete*, which is shared both by the questioner and the one who is questioned. All Dasein constantly lives in an understanding of *arete*. What and how a good citizen ought to be is prescribed for everyone in an interpretation that dominates the en-

As Yvon Lafrance (2010, p. 51) remarks, in Gadamer's reading, the Good and Beautiful are not transcendental concepts but empirical ones that structure human Dasein's modes of being through lived experience. For Gadamer, Plato's Forms manifest as a presence within particulars, determining Dasein's constitutive structure.

<sup>12</sup> In a later work, Idee undWirklichkeit in Platos «Timaios» [Idea and Reality in Plato's Timaeus] (GW 6, pp. 242–270), Gadamer would affirm that: "[...] The Philebus does not inquire, as the Republic does, about the idea of the Good and its function as paradigm for human life. Instead, it asks the reverse: how the concrete life of the human beings, with all its contingency and mixed character [Gemischeit],—its determination by both knowledge and insight as well as by impulse and pleasure—can nevertheless be 'good,' that is, can participate in the Good." (GW 6, p. 268).

tire public understanding of existence [das ganze öffentliche Daseinsverständnis beherrschenden Auslegung, der sog]. This is the so-called morality [Moral]. The concept of arete is thus a "public" concept. In it, the being of humans is understood as a being-with-others-in-a-community [das Sein des Menschen als ein Mit-Anderen-in-einer-Gemeinschaft] (the polis). (GW 5, p. 39; original emphasis)

Areté cannot be understood as something one simply possesses or lacks in an individualistic, proprietary sense. When Gadamer asserts that "with the claim to be a citizen comes necessarily the still broader claim to possess this arete, which makes one a citizen, that is, a human being" (GW 5, p. 40), he suggests that the possibility of 'appropriating' areté lies not in mastering or manipulating it, but rather in accessing it through the lógos in which all things reveal themselves as such. Thus, "the claim" to possess areté unmistakably points to this mode of participation. This interpretation probably illuminates Gadamer's recuperation of the Socratic dictum: "Virtue has no master; whether it is honoured or despised, each one will have a greater or lesser part of it. The responsibility belongs to him who chooses, god is not responsible" (Rep. 617e).

Each Dasein comes to self-understanding through an areté by virtue of its participation in the pólis, as such self-understanding constitutes its essential human character. This understanding entails not only the capacity to account for immediate actions that emerge from a more primary understanding occurring in *lógos*, but also the ability to make present what remains otherwise concealed. Socrates' discovery, as Gadamer interprets it, was that this process is not spontaneous: the seemingly self-evident truths of Dasein's average understanding—its conventional notions of right and wrong—require mediation. Thus, "The Socratic question about what arete is, is thus the demand for a rendering of accounts [Rechenschaftsgabe]" (GW 5, p. 40), representing a dialectical clarification of existential possibilities, "of what human being claims to be" (GW 5, p. 73). It is at this crucial juncture that dialectic and hermeneutics first converge, manifesting as both existential and communal theory and práxis, functioning as "the art of understanding and making the strange, the alien, and what has become alien speak" (Gadamer, 1991, p. 123).

This examination demands a labour upon oneself that, proceeding from prevailing interpretations, seeks to discover the common *for-what* of humanity and things—that is, a certain idea of the Good capable of providing a measure. Such a measure does not precede the community but rather emerges as its effect, thus giving rise to an ethico-political knowledge capable of realising a desirable way of life, a good living<sup>13</sup>. This investigation of oneself and one's otherness—which reaches its profoundest depth when undertaken as a shared pursuit—requires understanding one's own behaviour through an *areté* determined anew each time in relation to the Good, achieving with others a justification of the duty-to-do and of being in terms of the *Worum-willen* ["for-the-sake-of" or "that in view of which"] of one's own existence (GW 5, pp. 40, 44).

The Socratic will to mutual understanding [Verständigung] represents the most radical acceptance that one's own thesis may be challenged by another in pursuit of the truth of things. This is not a personal quest for an adequatio intellectus et rei or mere conformity between words and things, but rather a commitment among individuals that surpasses both simple conventionalism and instrumentalisation (GW 5, p. 39).

Yet consensus alone might merely indicate a mimetic adoption of opinions. For reaching agreement with others extends beyond merely sharing an opinion or concurring on a matter (GW 1, p. 390). Genuine agreement with another requires not only being in agreement with oneself but also the capacity to maintain any potential accord within the bounds of that about which one discourses—the *lógos* that belongs to no one. However, this owner-less centre that dwells 'between' two or more interlocutors, from which agreement may or may not emerge, loses its unappropriable character when manipulated to impress an audience or silence in-

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer 1995a (pp. 117-120).

terlocutors through monological discourse, as exemplified in sophistic *lógos* (GW 5, pp. 51–52; GW 1, pp. 373–374, 389). The persuasive strategies of mere eristics (*Phil*. 16e–17a), along with absolute hedonism's fixation on 'immediacy viewed from immediacy and for immediacy,' can lead only to one outcome: the mere achievement of conformity, suspending that dialogue with oneself and others which constitutes thought itself (GW 7, pp. 350, 365)<sup>14</sup>. As Gonzalez notes, this characterization of the hedonist position has profound implications: "[...] the alternative between the life of pleasure and the life of the good is not one between two choices but rather one between the abandonment of choice and choice itself" (2010, p. 181). The hedonist stance thus represents not merely one option among others but rather the rejection of dialectical engagement itself.

Authentic dialogue, therefore, finds its foundation in a shared condition of ignorance and a collective necessity to know. For a pólis to discover its Good (and consequently its true pleasure), it must proceed from the presupposition that all citizens mutually constitute and share both a "commonality [Gemeinsamkeit] of not-knowing and the commonality of the necessity to know"—that is to say, a collective recognition of the necessity for genuine and justified knowledge which initiates "a common inquiry" (GW 5, p. 44). It is precisely this collective pursuit that legitimates the very conception of knowledge or science: "The ultimate possibility of understanding is depends upon having in common a pre-understanding of the Good" (GW 5, p. 47).

This shared understanding of *areté* necessarily leads us to consider the ground of understanding: language. Language "is thus not at all a mere image [Abbild] of entities," like a shadow cast upon the cave wall by firelight, <sup>15</sup> or a neutral bearer of meanings, but rather constitutes the very foundation of understanding and, consequently, of human existence—both as the highest possi-

<sup>14</sup> See also Lammi 1998.

<sup>15</sup> See Syrotinski 2014.

bility of being and as philosophico-political bios (GW 5, p. 53; original emphasis). In Gadamer's interpretation, which draws particular insights from the celebrated Socratic "second sailing" in the *Phaedo*, being and *lógos* in Plato are intrinsically interconnected: speech emerges as an originary "common having-to-do with something," signifying a commitment to 'something' through language, which serves as the shared ground of both existence and knowledge (GW 5, p. 23; my emphasis).

Within the pólis, the "commonality of vital interests" [Die Gemeinsamkeit des Lebensinteresses] (GW 5, p. 53) unfolds from a primordial shared pre-understanding of the world—namely, in the conformation [Ausbildung] of language. As Lafrance remarks, "For Gadamer, it is within language that the thing appears as a thing" and "the truth of the thing, as a phenomenon of intentional consciousness, resides within language itself, in the articulation of the words that express that thing" (2010, p. 58). "Our knowledge of the true and the true itself always remain distinct as well, because the true is not exhausted in its being-known," adds Herbert Schnädelbach when commenting on the Platonic "theory of the objective possibility of dialogue" as characterized by Gadamer (Schnädelbach, 1987, p. 5). Therefore, it is through this conformation, this "taking something as something in discourse [Rede] (where it is irrelevant whether this is proclaimed externally by speech or not)" (GW 5, p. 121), that all who have previously assented to this commonality understand themselves and can achieve renewed understanding through dialogue. For the object of dialectic is the *amphisbētēsinon*: not merely the opposition between competing opinions, but rather that something which both underlies and shapes the very domain of disputation (GW 5, pp. 73 n. 20, 33)<sup>16</sup>.

Consequently, in Gadamer's phenomenological conception, the "world" is pre-understood intersubjectively through language (GW 5, p. 53). Yet what does "intersubjectivity" mean in this context,

<sup>16</sup> See also Phdr. 263a.

and what implications does this invocation of the subject carry? It is crucial to recognise that Gadamer is not advocating a return to the modern cognitive model—to the Cartesian subject. The intersubjectivity he describes is not the mere conjunction of two given, self-enclosed interiorities with clearly delineated boundaries; rather, it is an attribute of language as world-understanding. The *inter* does not function as a bridge between individuals, nor is it an instrument facilitating passage from one side to another—not a thread along which consciousness travels between minds. This conception rejects both the possibility that 'subjects' might emerge unchanged from their encounter, maintaining pristine 'points of view,' and the notion that one consciousness might simply subsume another through superior capacity for absorption.

The *inter* of intersubjectivity resides, rather, in the "between" that *lógos* presupposes—the common language in whose truth the "interlocutors" participate. This shared linguistic ground brings them together in commonality insofar as they maintain themselves in an open disposition to conversation, in the permanent overcoming of their own limits of understanding. As Gadamer would later articulate in the second volume of *Wahrheit und Methode*: "Commonality that is so thoroughly common that it is no longer my opinion and your opinion, but rather a shared interpretation of the world that makes moral and social solidarity possible" (GW 2, p. 188).

For Gadamer, Platonic philosophy is inherently dialectical because it conceives human beings in their very act of understanding as entities that are fundamentally "*Unterwegs*" [on the way] and "*Zwischen*" [in between] (GW 5, p. 6). This conception recognises that humanity's highest possibility and task encounters its insurmountable limit in the face of its realisation—namely, its inescapable belonging to the temporal and plural domain of finitude. Thus,

<sup>17</sup> Considering the foregoing is fundamental for understanding not only the ethico-political implications of the foundations of philosophical hermeneutics, but also the meaning that Gadamer's celebrated concept of *Horizontverschmelzung*, 'fusion of horizons', would adopt in *Wahrheit und Methode* (GW 1, pp. 312, 383, 450).

"philosophy [...] is not  $\sigma o \phi (\alpha)$ , the knowledge that provides one disposition over something, but rather a striving for that. As such, it is the highest possibility of human beings" (GW 5, p. 7).

Within the open terrain of questionability, both existence and philosophy are achieved dialectically. It is here that human claims to knowledge and reality enter into tension, converging around things in that space between knowledge and ignorance where  $d\delta xa$ , as an intermediate faculty [metaxú], "grasps what wanders in the middle" (Rep. 478a–479d)—suspended between the poles of life and death.

[...] Platonic philosophy is not a conceptual preservation of this highest possibility, but rather the enactment of this possibility itself. But this means that being human involves not having disposal over oneself and that philosophy, as a human possibility, accomplishes itself dialectically, in this dialectical questionability [Fraglichkeit] in which it knows itself as [a] human [activity]. (GW 5, p. 7)

Donatella Di Cesare demonstrates how this 'between,' this 'through,' manifests in the Greek prefix día and shapes Gadamer's interpretation of Platonic philosophy—particularly in the concepts of dialectic, dialogue, and diairesis. This prefix consistently performs an opening function, taking the form of "provisionality, indeterminacy, and incompleteness," while dialectic knows itself "as finite, it accepts infinite openness." In this sense, "This dialectic is dialogical: the 'between' is the between of the dialogue," which "unfolds in an exemplary manner with the guiding thread of language," of the *lógoi* (Di Cesare, 2013, p. 130; original emphasis; 2010, p. 84). As Gadamer articulated in Wahrheit und Methode regarding the dialecticspeculative structure of language, "the finite possibilities of the word are assigned to the intended meaning towards the infinite" (GW 1, p. 473), for "all human speech is finite in the sense that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be unfolded and interpreted" (GW 1, p. 462).

In recognising the structure of *lógos*, Plato initiated a transformation in the concept of being, one that reached its culmination in

the Sophist: being henceforth becomes dynamis or 'possibility'—the origin of action or of passion (Soph. 247d8). Yet this extends beyond the assertion that everything capable of acting or suffering exists fully: "being is always at the same time non-being, that is, that in which it differs from all else, or: all that it is not" (GW 6, p. 24). The mixture comprises (though not exclusively) "of being and non-being, of the same and the different"—one manifestation of the interweaving of Ideas (GW 6, p. 22). This insight leads Gadamer to assert elsewhere that dialectic "does not think being (essentia) [das Was-sein] in logos; rather it thinks being itself as logos" (GW 6, p. 28; original emphasis). Here we find his initial investigation into "the fundamental finite constitution of being, which is, from its very foundation, linguistically configured" (GW 1, p. 462).

As Di Cesare remarks, Gadamer's reading of Platonic dialectic reveals how Plato achieves a crucial philosophical breakthrough: while maintaining the positive value of limit inherited from earlier philosophy, he simultaneously rehabilitates the unlimited through a novel interpretation of non-being as being-other. This rehabilitation was decisive for philosophical hermeneutics. "The unlimited is no longer the measureless infinity of non-being always verging on its engulfment in nothingness; rather, it is the difference of non-being in its infinite differentiation" (Di Cesare, 2010, p. 88). In this way, limit manifests as the identity of the one while the unlimited expresses the difference of the multiple. This reconceptualization leads to a new understanding of being itself: rather than attempting to eliminate non-being, it recognizes that non-being only is insofar as it is not. This insight enables both the "salvation" of logos and the demonstration of the reciprocal participation between being and non-being, identity and difference. It is through the concept of the dyad, Di Cesare argues, that Plato achieves this rehabilitation of the unlimited—no longer as measureless infinity but as difference in its infinite differentiation. Hence, when Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics develops around the concept of limit as a philosophy of infinite finitude "it appears as the heir of Platonic philosophy" (2010, p. 88), particularly in its comprehension

of how dialogue mediates between unity and multiplicity, identity and difference, in an endless process of understanding.

### 3. The Detour of Dasein

Before examining the specific divergences between Gadamer and Heidegger<sup>18</sup>, we must first acknowledge the fundamental influence of Heideggerian thought on Gadamer's early work, particularly visible in their shared interest in ancient philosophy. Gadamer's use of phenomenological categories in his reading of the *Philebus*, whilst drawing on Heideggerian concepts, served to uncover features present in Platonic thought that conventional interpretations had overlooked. Thus, key phenomenological notions allowed Gadamer to highlight aspects of Platonic thought that traditional historical-philological approaches had overlooked. As Lafrance demonstrates, Gadamer's book centers around five key concepts: Dasein, the ontological difference between Sein and Seiende, Vorverständnis, Sprache and Wahrheit. In particular, Lafrance shows that Gadamer's use of Dasein allows him to move beyond the traditional body-soul dichotomy in reading the *Philebus* (Lafrance, 2010, p. 49), enabling Gadamer to consider human beings "in their concrete existence, lived experience, and perception of a world" (2010, p. 61).

Furthermore, a fundamental convergence with Heideggerian thought can be traced to §27, "General Characterisation of Sophistry," from his 1926 summer course *Die Grundbegriffe der anti-ken Philosophie* [Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy]: "In sophistry, reflection moves from a consideration of the World to the interpretation of Dasein, specifically on Dasein's possibilities of knowledge and comportment, morally and politically" (2008, p. 68; GA 22, p. 83). This characterisation of sophistry as an interpretation of Dasein in its political possibilities aligns closely with the Gadamerian thesis presented here: the *areté* within which Dasein exists—

<sup>18</sup> See also Niall Keane's important observation that Gadamer's divergence from Heidegger is rarely made explicit, and must instead be read as an understated yet sustained philosophical distancing (2021, p. 260).

which may indeed be sophistic *areté* in Plato's era—governs the understanding of actions within a community.

Gadamer's conception of areté must be also examined in relation to §27 of Sein und Zeit, where "publicness" [die Öffentlichkeit] unifies the modes of being of the "they" [das Man]—distantiality, averageness and levelling down—and thereby governs the interpretation of both world and Dasein (GA 2, p. 127). The power of publicness lies precisely in its capacity to present everything as self-evident; yet this very clarity serves to obscure the concealed nature of that which manifests itself as readily available and known in shared everydayness. Thus, in Gadamer's reading, Socratic-Platonic areté would synthesise what Heidegger distinguishes as Auslegung and Öffentlichkeit—interpretation and publicness.

It would be equally misguided to deny Heidegger's explicit influence on Gadamer (GW 5, p. 159) as it would be to conflate their distinct philosophical positions. Whilst a comprehensive analysis of the convergences between both thinkers—particularly regarding their interpretations of Aristotle and Plato—lies beyond our present scope, we must nonetheless attend to certain specific modulations that reveal a broader and more significant divergence, one that Gadamer himself acknowledged.

Gadamer's formulations extend beyond mere replication or transposition of Heideggerian thought into the horizon of antiquity. This becomes evident, for instance, in his treatment of speech. Whilst Gadamer acknowledges that speech—particularly in the confirmation of consensus by another—can manifest insubstantial or fallen forms (GW 5, p. 33) (analogous to that inconducive movement that Platonic Socrates identifies as *adoleschia* or idle talk in *Tht*. 195bc), his interpretation of the progression from Socratic dialogue through Platonic dialectic to Aristotelian apodictics differs crucially from Heidegger. Gadamer's reading neither admits a solipsistic path to authenticity nor abandons the characterisation of Dasein as *zōon lógon échon*.

Similarly, Gadamer's phenomenology of emotions in his work on the *Philebus* diverges notably from that of *Sein und Zeit*. Whilst he acknowledges that pain entails a disturbance—an interruption

of recreational distraction—which enables a temporality wherein existence might be reappropriated, creating "a sojourn [Aufenthalt] in which Dasein becomes tangibly aware of its own continual gravity" (GW 5, pp. 129–130; original emphasis), this alone proves insufficient for Dasein's movement towards self-knowledge. Rather, it merely demonstrates the mixed nature of pleasure founded upon the negation of suffering, and its counterpart: an intense yet ultimately aporetic pain. As Gadamer observes, "[...] Dasein, when it suffers a pain, is especially anxious to seek forgetfulness in enjoyment, and precisely the most intense pleasures—above all those bodily ones—have this character of numbness" (GW 5, p. 130; original emphasis).

For Gadamer's Plato, pure pleasure does not manifest as satisfied privation, but rather as the unexpected [der Plötzlich]<sup>19</sup>. Pleasure emerges in the unveiling of being in its mere presence. The highest genre of life—'happiness' in its eminent sense—becomes possible only through a proper mixture of hēdonē and phrónēsis. As Gadamer concludes, "Dasein understands itself in its highest possibility, v.g.,: it understands itself as knowing," that is, as questioning. "Pleasure and taking enjoyment befall it insofar as they are encountered within this orientation towards its highest possibility" (GW 5, p. 155).

Gadamer's dialogue with Heidegger parallels, in essence, the nature of Socratic dialogue itself. Rather than pursuing mere persuasion, empathy, or imitation, it proposed a deliberate detour from and of the analytic of Dasein—a departure made possible by abandoning the reading of Plato "as the forerunner of ontotheology" (GW 2, p. 12). This turn, which resonates with philosophy's authentic task as conceived by the 'political Plato,' constituted for Gadamer "a genuine deviation from Heidegger's thought [einer echten Abweichung von Heideggers Denken]" (GW 2, p. 12)<sup>20</sup>. Gadamer

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rep. 584e; Phaed. 258e3.

<sup>20 &</sup>quot;Hence, I touch upon the point of a genuine deviation from Heidegger's thought, [and it is a point] to which I dedicated a large part of my work and especially my studies on Plato" (GW 2, p. 12). This deviation would have, in large part, as a celebrated corollary

thus undertook what Heidegger never achieved (nor attempted), to make "[...] the Platonic writings speak, which are permeated with a musical character so very differently [from that of the non-scholastic Aristotle]" (1994, p. 143).

These philosophical differences take on particular significance when we consider their respective approaches to 'the political.' While both thinkers initially characterized the political as humanity's fundamental possibility, their paths would diverge dramatically in their understanding of its implications. Accordingly, despite the possible convergences between Gadamer's philosophy of this period and Heidegger's thought—such as the conception that "paideia is not Bildung"<sup>21</sup> but rather an existential cognate of aletheia, synonymous with he hemetera physis, humanity's intermediate essence in perpetual and irreducible tension with apaideusia, which enables human beings to philosophise, that is, to be free (GA 34, pp. 114–115)—Heidegger's work lacks the sustained reflection on the pólis and politics that characterises Gadamer's early writings. Significantly, the timing of Gadamer's engagement with these topics—from 1928 to 1933<sup>22</sup>, with the exception of the

the philosophical hermeneutics of Wahrheit und Methode: "The philosophical stimuli that I received from Heidegger led me increasingly to the realms of dialectic, both Platonic and Hegelian. I devoted decades of teaching to elaborating and testing [...] the Platonic-Aristotelian unitary effect. Yet in the background loomed the constant challenge presented by the path Heidegger's thought took, particularly his interpretation of Plato as marking the decisive step toward the forgetfulness of Being in 'metaphysical thinking.' My elaboration and projection of a philosophical hermeneutics in Wahrheit und Methode bears witness to my efforts to theoretically resist this challenge" (GW 7, p. 130). Earlier, on April 5, 1961, Gadamer had sent Leo Strauss a letter in which he assured him "My point of departure is not the complete forgetfulness of being, the 'night of being,' rather on the contrary—I say this against Heidegger as well as against Buber—the unreality of such an assertion" (1978, p. 8).

<sup>21</sup> For Heidegger, "Παιδεία is not education, but μεταβολή" (GA 34, p. 114). Heidegger's interpretation ultimately subordinates the practical-ethical dimension to fundamental ontology. Gadamer, in contrast, preserves the inherently dialogical and intersubjective character of paideia as essential to its philosophical significance.

<sup>22</sup> Plato und die Dichter was delivered as a lecture by Gadamer on January 24, 1934, at the Gesellschaft der Freunde des humanistischen Gymnasiums, upon invitation from its president, the theologian Rudolf Bultmann, at the Gymnasium Philippinum in Marburg. The text had been submitted by its author in 1933 to Vittorio Klostermann, publisher of his

1942's essay "Platos Staat der Erziehung"—coincides with the profound social, political and cultural crisis of the Weimar Republic that witnessed both the emergence and ascension of National Socialism. The same cannot be said of his teacher Heidegger.

A telling example, though not without its complexities, presents itself: whilst Gadamer's definition of pólis as "the being of humans" understood "as a being-with-others-in-a-community" (GW 5, p. 39) bears unmistakable Heideggerian resonances—particularly in relation to §74 of Being and Time where Heidegger declines Mitsein [being-with] as Mitgeschehen [co-historizing] of a "Gemeinschaft, des Volkes" [community, of the people] (GA 2, p. 383)—one must interrogate the significance of Gadamer's early deviation from the Heideggerian conception of Dasein. This raises crucial questions about both the nature and trajectory of this divergence, particularly as it unfolds through Gadamer's subsequent interpretation of Plato.

Why did Gadamer resist following Heidegger's trajectory towards the negation of the political in pursuit of its purported origin (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1981, pp. 200–201; 1998, pp. 32–33; 2002, pp. 160–161)—a path wherein the *pólis*, when not reduced to *Staatsgemeinschaft* ("State as community," [...] "which the human being can and must give form to") as nation or people that decides for the State (GA 38, pp. 75–77; 2009, pp. 73–77), within a his-

friend Max Kommerell, and had to be modified following a negative assessment by Walter F. Otto. Consequently, Gadamer restructured the work and created a new version reduced to less than half the original length, which is the version we know today. In a 1986 interview with Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, Gadamer said: "I always was a liberal. It is true: I didn't speak about these things during the Third Reich. There was no need to directly report to the executioner for those of us, like myself and my friends, who were part of the opposition. Thus I had begun writing about Greek philosophy, before 1933, in quite a political way, about the Sophists, for example. Now how could I have avoided referring to Carl Schmitt in this context? You know his definition of the 'political' merely in terms of enemies and friends as conceptual opposites (Gegensatz). That is very much like the position of a Sophist. But I had to refrain from all this—and so I only published Plato and the Poets' (1992, p. 148). For other Gadamer's (theoretical and political) considerations and (explicit or implicit) references to Schmitt, see GW 5 (pp. 254—255), GW 2 (pp. 379–381), 1984 (p. 2).

torial [geschichtlichen] and spiritual mission (GA 16, pp. 107–117), ultimately came to signify historicity (GA 40, pp. 161–162)?

Though both thinkers initially characterised the political as humanity's fundamental possibility, Heidegger would later renounce this view, citing an insurmountable metaphysical incompatibility between the event of the *pólis* and politics' belonging to the realm of machination [Machenschaft] (GA 40, p. 68; GA 96, p. 53). Why did Gadamer diverge from this philosophical-political path that led Heidegger to identify being with "the history of a people" (GA 34, p. 145), the people with the entity, and the State with being (Heidegger, 2009, p. 74) Why did Gadamer reject the notion that their mutual and inseparable realisation required both the effective, operative will of a Führer—a man with ontological priority who would transform others into followers from whom community would arise (2009, p. 87)—and a "political nobility" as guardians of tradition? (2009, pp. 71-72, 78, 80, 92-93) Why propose, instead, an existential ideal of the philosopher and politician as citizen—one who neither renounces concern for matters relating to the pólis nor divests himself of the passion that weaves the polemical thread of philosophy, with its severe, uncompromising gaze towards both present and past?

A preliminary answer, though necessarily simplified, might be found in the figure of Socrates—neither a philosophy professor nor a professional politician, but rather a philosopher in the sense that Pythagoras first claimed before Leon, according to both Diogenes (I, 12) and Cicero (*Disp.Tusc.*, V.37.8). Socrates posed the question of the just and reflective life as relevant to all humanity. Gadamer, through Plato, approached the political dimension of philosophy in precisely this way: it was not a matter of possessing specialist competence to address the challenges of communal life, nor of professional philosophers being uniquely qualified to govern the State directly or guide its leadership spiritually. Any such interpretation confuses knowledge, understanding, and science with expertise, thereby reducing Plato to an apologist for what we now term 'technocracy'—the rule of supposed 'specialists.'

Yet this Gadamerian rejection of technical expertise does not entail seeking an exceptional individual, a leader distinguished by "the impressed form of his being" [der geprägten Form seines Seins] (Heidegger, 2009, p. 73). Rather, it demands that individuals become capable of orienting, through reasoned dialogue, those questions that challenge the dogmatic assumptions of their community—the very community within which they find themselves already existentially understood, grounded in certain habits and values (éthos). The philosopher-as-citizen cannot and must not abdicate the responsibility he bears towards himself, to a Thou, and to a we. Thus, the paradigmatic models for Gadamer's dialogico-dialectical ethical-politics cannot be found in rigid, defined figures [Gestalt] of either Socrates or Plato, each comfortably ensconced in their doctrinal certainties, but rather in the 'in between' space that dwells amidst the Platonic Socrates and the Socratic Plato (GW 5, p. 5).

To think about the  $p\delta lis$  is to think about Dasein. The  $p\delta lis$  is the mode of being of the "worldly" human being. In this, Gadamer (GW 5, p. 18) and Heidegger would undoubtedly agree, though their paths diverge significantly: for Gadamer, the  $p\delta lis$  is neither an "archi-political" instance, as Lacoue-Labarthe terms it (1998, p. 201), nor is community, as people, its essence. For the philosopher of the fusion of horizons, philosophy could only be grounded in a fundamental horizontality.

To better grasp the distinctiveness and originality of Gadamer's thought, it is of utmost importance to revisit certain arguments advanced by Heidegger during this same period in his seminar *Einleitung in die Philosophie* [Introduction to Philosophy]<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> do not share Alejandro Vigo's thesis that although the 1928/29 seminar "is not fundamentally oriented from the consideration of dialogical structures" [...] "nevertheless, it includes as one of its basic objectives the revelation of structural conditions that account for the possibility of all genuine dialogue, such as these conditions have been subsequently revealed by conceptions of essentially dialogical orientation" (2008, p. 262).

The concept of *Miteinandersein* or being-one-with-another was first introduced by Heidegger in §26 of *Sein und Zeit*. However, as Francisco González (2009, p. 63) notes, its treatment in the 1928/29 seminar achieves greater depth. Heidegger opens §13 by revisiting a familiar argument from his most celebrated work: the entities that share our mode of being are not other Dasein merely "alongside" us, but rather there "with" us. *Dasein is*, in relation to itself, *Mit-dasein*, determined and defined "by a being-with with other" (GA 27, pp. 84–85). Here, the "with" must be understood as participation [*Teilnahme*] and as indicating commonality [*Gemeins-amkeit*], a common character [*Gemeinschaftliche*], what we may call "communal", i.e., that "the same (can be said) or holds for both the one and the other" (GA 27, p. 88).

Furthermore, this commonality emerges not in the actual or potential use that it can be made of common things but in sharing [teilen], which means "reciprocally letting something both for and in use" (GA 27, p. 100). Our capacity to reciprocally let ourselves have what is common presupposes a prior and originary letting-be [Sein-lassen] that makes it possible, a certain indifference [Gleich-gültigkeit] underlying our relation to things that allows them to appear as such in each occasion (GA 27, pp. 102–103). Yet what we share with each other are not the entities that are present at hand, but rather their unconcealment—that is, the truth that befits them: "What is common is the truth of beings" (GA 27, p. 105). Thus, "being-one-with-another is a sharing of truth" and the latter "constitutive of the structure of being-one-with-another as an essential mode of being of Dasein" (GA 27, p. 110).

Being-one-with-another cannot be reduced to mere factical being-there-with-others, as *Existenz* may factically exist alone without ceasing to imply being-one-with-another (GA 27, pp. 117ff.). Nor is it an I encountering a thou, an encapsulated existence alongside another, derived from some "altruistic" formula that merely introduces a sort of "of solipsism of two" (GA 27, p. 146). Yet paradoxically, a subject immersed, absorbed without reflection, makes community [*Gemeinschaft*] possible.

One might initially object that no paradox exists here: Heidegger seeks merely to demonstrate the structure of Dasein and how community establishes itself upon the foundation of the one-with-another [Miteinander]. Indeed, the aim is not to identify contradiction but rather to illuminate a substantial distinction between his ontology of Dasein and Gadamer's early dialogical philosophy. For Heidegger, the I-thou relationship presupposes its prior determination by the one-with-another precisely because community is always already presupposed, and reflection upon it cannot generate anything essential to community itself. In other words, community remains liberated from reflection, while the experience of finitude stays confined within the historical destiny of Dasein's facticity, oriented towards self-reappropriation. As Heidegger himself puts it: the I does not "break into the other" (GA 27, p. 145).

## 4. Conclusions: The Collision of Dasein

For Heidegger, the other begins nothing. Whilst one might suppose that his view of politics as non-essential to community's existence would preserve politics as a domain of pure freedom, the contrast we seek to emphasise here reveals something different: a  $p\acute{o}lis$  'liberated' from reflection—particularly self-reflection—and a Dasein freed from the other's irruption renders politics both unnecessary and trivial.

In an interview conducted between 1999 and 2000 with Ricardo Dottori, Gadamer articulated his position with striking clarity: "The *Mit-sein* becomes really sustainable only with one another" (Gadamer, 2002, p. 26). Unlike Heidegger, Gadamer acknowledged having "gradually developed" within his philosophical work not the *Mit-sein*—which he regarded, within Heideggerian analytics, as a mere inconsequential concession—but rather the *Miteinander* (Gadamer, 2002, p. 26). A presupposed, taken-forgranted *Mit-sein* corresponds to an enfeebled, undifferentiated, repeatable, superfluous other—a falsified joint existence exhausted in a "'letting others be'" ['Den anderen sein lassen'] that fails to

awaken "a genuine 'being-turned-towards-them' ['Ihmzugewandt-sein']" (Gadamer, 2002, p. 26).

The true letting-be of the other and otherness that Gadamer envisions in 1931, which will mark his philosophical hermeneutics, cannot be equated with an originary indifference. "Letting-be does not mean: merely repeating what one already knows" but rather letting a Thou, an epoch, a work of art, or a text be for that which we are now "through the encounter itself" (GW 8, p. 139). For Gadamer, this unpredictable encounter has the force of a genuine beginning which opens ethically the meaning of finitude, allowing what was to be, not as self-enclosed but as that which one is particularly becoming and cannot cease to be, oriented towards the transcendence of personal limitations that make all understanding possible: "only the individual human being has a Thou" (Gadamer, 1995b, p. 39).

The Heideggerian abandonment of true letting-be entails both a reciprocal human desertion and a desertion of philosophy and its authentic task; it leads inexorably to isolation, self-alienation, humanity's radical enmity against itself, and blindness to the existential hermeneutic situation<sup>24</sup>. Not coincidentally, in the aforementioned interview, Gadamer concludes that what he had unsuccessfully attempted to demonstrate to Heidegger in the 1920s had been that

[...] the true meaning of our finitude or our thrownness [Geworfenheit] consists not only in becoming aware of our historical conditionedness, but above all of the fact that we are conditioned by the other. Precisely in our ethical relation to the other it becomes clear to us how difficult it is to do justice to the demands of the other or even simply to become aware of them. The only wise way not to succumb to our finitude is to open ourselves to the other, to listen to the 'Thou' that stands before us. (2002, p. 33)

<sup>24</sup> See Gadamer 1983 (pp. 123-138).

If Gadamer's engagement with dialectic had already sketched an early divergence from his teacher, this distance widened considerably when he questioned in what sense Platonic dialectic is (or can be) ethical (GW 5, p. 158)<sup>25</sup>. Heidegger himself never pursued this inquiry, though he had—as Trabattoni acknowledges (2009, pp. 133–134)—established its groundwork in 1929 within *Vom Wesen des Grundes* [*The Essence of Ground*]. There, in attempting to connect the *agathón* as *aitía* with Dasein's transcendence and its projective capacity, through Plato (*Rep.* 509b), Heidegger writes:

But can the ἀγαθόν be interpreted as the transcendence of *Da*sein? [...] The problem of the ἀγαθόν is merely the culminating point of the central and concrete question about the leading fundamental possibility of the existence of Dasein in the polis. Even if the task of an ontological project of Dasein is neither explicitly placed, nor even developed, on its metaphysical foundation, the threefold characterization of the ἀγαθόν, elaborated with constant analogy to the "sun," leads to the question about the possibility of truth, understanding, and Being—or, in the gathering together of these phenomena, towards the question about the primordial, unified ground of the possibility of the truth of the understanding of Being. As the disclosing project of Being, this understanding is the primordial action of human existence, in which all existing in the midst of being must be rooted. Thus, the ἀγαθόν is that ἕξις [potency] which is master of the possibility (in the sense of enablement) of truth, understanding, and even of Being, and indeed of all three together in their unity. (GA 9, p. 160)

One might object that this aligns with Gadamer's characterisation in *Platos dialektische Ethik* of the Good as *Worumwillen* of being human and as prerequisite of understanding, equivalent to *areté*. In Gadamer's text, the Good cannot constitute a knowledge possessed by few, "by means of which only the 'wise' distinguish themselves;"

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of Heidegger's influence on Gadamer and the latter's identification of dialectic with ethics, see Trabattoni 2010. See also González 2010.

rather, since the "claim to this knowledge constitutes the essence of human existence," [...] "each one must claim to have [it], and therefore, insofar as one does not have it, must constantly seek it" (GW 5, p. 39)<sup>26</sup>. Fifty years after the publication of *Platos Dialektische Ethik*, Gadamer will state:

The Socratic originary experience that allowed philosophy to become dialectic (and perhaps was already dialectic before Socrates, without knowing it, that is, dialogue of the soul with itself), appears to me less to serve as a preparation metaphysics, the 'first science,' but rather to have made human beings aware of their natural disposition towards philosophy. The human being not only 'has' language, *logos*, reason—rather, it is placed into the open, constantly exposed to the possibility and necessity of questioning, beyond any attainable answer. This is what *Dasein* means. (GW 10, pp. 107–108)

The meaning of the Gadamerian *Worumwillen* emerges distinctly in the context of the first appearance of the notion *of Spiel* [play] in Gadamer's work, understood as a mode of present and shared existence in an activity whose object is subordinated to the very "for-the-sake-of" (play) (GW 5, p. 25). This operative conception of *Spiel* and *Worumwillen* becomes Gadamer's interpretative key to examine understanding and self-care in relation to the *agathón* in both Plato and Aristotle (GW 5, pp. 40, 44, 58)—the condition of Dasein's self-understanding in a determined *areté*, oriented each time towards the Good and situated action. Like Heidegger (GA 22), Gadamer rejected the modern identification, advanced by Rudolf H. Lotze (1817–1881), between the *agathón* and validity—a conception of Good as formal realm of objective value-validity (Lotze, 1843, p. 7), of moral economy and factual obligation, which would reinforce the dualist conception of *chorismós*.

However, in rejecting this neo-Kantian appropriation of Plato, Gadamer did not seek to demonstrate the superiority of Aristotelian over Platonic ontology, but rather to reveal their common

<sup>26</sup> See Gadamer 1991 (pp. 110-124).

root in *lógos* as well as humanity's full participation in *areté*. This participation is linked to a form of knowledge (*Meno*. 89a) that is neither technical nor theoretical: a practical reasonableness that functions not as instrument or faculty but as an existential disposition oriented towards *tó agathón* (GW 5, p. 246).

Yet, the differences between Heidegger's and Gadamer's positions prove both ostensible and insurmountable. In his winter semester 1931/32 seminar, Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet [The Essence of Truth. On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus], Heidegger unequivocally declared that the Platonic Idea of the Good "is not at all a matter of something ethical or moral" (GA 34, p. 100) (nor logical nor gnoseological), but only the enablement of being and unconcealment. Heidegger stated that to agathon "does not have any kind of moral meaning of the Good; ethics has corrupted the grounding meaning of this word" (GA 34, p. 106; original emphasis). Furthermore, for Heidegger the Good is "the empowerment of being and unhiddenness to their unified, unitary essence" (GA 34, p. 109), "what is at stake in the interrogation of being and truth" (GA 34, p. 111), "the stalwart, that which asserts itself and stands its ground, in contrast to the harmless, old-maidish meaning of: a good person - proper but lacking both penetrating vision and forceful impact" (GA 34, p. 106). While Heidegger claims in his 1931/32 seminar that the "'Good' means it will be done! it is decided!" (GA 34, p. 106), he himself yet refrains from deciding this decision, admitting that

What this empowerment is and how it occurs has not been answered to this day; indeed not only has this question not been answered, but it is no longer even asked in the original Platonic sense. Meanwhile, it has almost become a triviality: omne ens is a bonum. For whoever asks philosophically, Plato says more than enough. For someone who only wants to establish what the Good might be for everyday use, he says far too little, even nothing at all. If one takes it merely at face value, nothing can be done with what stands there. This illumination of the Idea of the Good says anything only for philosophical questioning. (GA 34, p. 111)

Henceforth, whilst Heideggerian notions of ethics, the Good, and  $p\acute{o}lis$  would remain inseparable (though this would not hold true for the relationship between  $p\acute{o}lis$  and the concepts of 'the political' and politics), their unity would manifest itself in a manner fundamentally distinct from Gadamer's interpretation. Heidegger's stark decisionist rejection of any ethical dimension in Plato's concept of the Good stands in sharp contrast to Gadamer's reading. For Gadamer seeks to preserve the practical-ethical significance of  $t\acute{o}$  agath\'on while acknowledging its ontological implications. He maintains the dialogical dimension of the Good without reducing it to either pure ontology or mere morality.

Just as the Heideggerian pólis of 1935 was reduced to the Da of Dasein, "the site of history" [die Geschichtsstätte] (GA 40, p. 161), by the summer semester of 1942, for a Heidegger increasingly disenchanted with National Socialism (GA 96, p. 43), it had become "the site of historical dwelling" of human beings, (GA 53, 108). Unlike his position in the 1933/34 seminar, the pólis no longer equated to Staatsgemeinschaft, nor was it the duty of the entity-people-nation to decide for being-State (GA 38, pp. 75–77), "the  $\pi \acute{o}\lambda i \varsigma$  cannot be determined 'politically.' The  $\pi \acute{o}\lambda i \varsigma$ , and precisely it, is therefore not a 'political' concept" (GA 53, p. 99). Even in the Schwarze Hefte of 1939–1941, Heidegger would assert "Politics no longer has anything to do with the πόλις, nor with morality, and even less with 'becoming a people' [Volkwerdung!" (GA 96, p. 43). This final point proves crucial for understanding that, beyond the varied modulations of Heidegger's pólis throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the declaration appearing in the Schwarze Hefte of the subsequent period (1942–1948) reflects what ultimately endures from Sein und Zeit: "They demand an 'ethics' and do not see that here the dreaded 'theory' still runs amok. It is believed that philosophy becomes true 'philosophy' when it becomes 'popular.' 'Ethics' is the 'technique' of norms; [they are] inexpert in the  $\tilde{\eta}\theta \circ \zeta$ " (GA 97, p. 86).

For Heidegger, it is not Aristotle's lessons on ethics but rather Sophocles' tragedies (particularly *Antigone*) that speak of this

dwelling. Similarly, his interpretation of Heraclitus' fragment B119 in the celebrated *Brief über den "Humanismus"* [*Letter on "Humanism"*] of 1946 enables a definition of *ēthos*, as previously of *pólis*, that culminates in *Aufenthalt*, "dwelling," "abode" (GA 9, pp. 354–355).

Yet the dwelling of "originary ethics" yields not to human beings, but to ontology. Heideggerian ethics, whilst indeed withdrawing from the domain of norms—from what Hartmann termed in 1926 the 'tyranny of values' (1935, p. 524)—halts before the truth of being and dwells there in solitude. Despite Jean-Luc Nancy's attempts to revitalise it (2001), the *Aufenthalt*, parallel to what occurs with politics, resolves into a kind of "archiethics," another negation in the name (of the affirmation) "of the origin of the origin." Tragically, this too constitutes a way of conceiving communal life. Nothing that this conception of Heidegger implies can be found in Gadamer's texts or in his ethico-political interpretation of Plato.

The enabling character of the *agathón* in Gadamerian philosophy does not diminish but rather intensifies its ethico-political force, never abandoning its Socratic-Platonic matrix and its renewed interrogation and valuation of ethics and dialectic. Though Fred Dallmayr made this observation regarding *Plato und die Dichter* and *Platos Staat der Erziehung*, it bears repeating that already in these early texts "Gadamer's approach [...] has the character of a political or moral-political hermeneutics (in contradistinction to the philosophical-ontological variant)" (1990, p. 93)—that is, Heidegger's.

As Cristopher Smith acknowledges, "thus in Gadamer, as opposed to Heidegger, in my being with others I give as much as I receive. Action is interaction, reciprocal relation. It is meeting, encounter, *Begegnung*, and not Heidegger's "*Begegnis*" or the one-sided "towardsing" of the other in our direction (*gegen uns*)" (Smith, 1997, p. 516). "For Gadamer", as Di Cesare suggests, "[...] the

<sup>27</sup> Heraclitus's sentence reads ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων (fr. B119 D-K, I, 177). There are multiple possible translations. Yet, the Heideggerian interpretation, which renders ἦθος as dwelling, is discussed and dismissed as implausible by Hülsz Piccone (2011, p. 268, n. 59; 2009).

experience of finitude is the collision [*l'urto*] of *Dasein* against its limits, which indeed, while it reveals its irrefutable excentricity, drives *Dasein* at the same time to go outside itself into a beyond that is always the infinite beyond of the other" (2013, p. 14)<sup>28</sup>. This collision [ $Ansto\beta$ ] constitutes an encounter [Begegnung] that determines how we let what is or has been be for us as we are now (GW 8, p. 139).

The Gadamerian Seinlassen actualises itself as Sprechenlassen: it acknowledges Andersheit, allowing the Thou to speak, yet not unconditionally—that otherness must speak meaningfully for oneself, always anew (GW 1, p. 367). This is the very possibility, as Babich remarks, of understanding "otherwise," of interpretation, which is inseparable from the philological-philosophical matrix of Gadamer's thought (Babich, 2022)<sup>29</sup>. "Every encounter with tradition [Überlieferung] that takes place within historical consciousness," Gadamer argues, "experiences in itself the tension between the text and the present" (GW 1, p. 311). Texts 'arch themselves' thanks to this tension [Spannung], to the intensity that "plays between the strangeness [Fremdheit] and familiarity [Vertrautheit] that tradition holds for us, between distant objectivity [Gegenständlichkeit], historically intended, and belonging to a tradition" (GW 1, p. 300). This is the moving ground on which philosophical hermeneutics can be 'received,' this is its own space. "In this inbetween [Zwischen] lies the true place of hermeneutics" (GW 1, p. 300; original emphasis).

For Gadamer, agreement—the commitment to place oneself under the truth of language—unites individuals not through mere aggregation or massive atomization, but through transformation. It offers them the possibility of forging a sense of belonging through participation, continuously evolving since, as he would later assert, "all living communities are communities of

<sup>28</sup> See also Di Cesare 2003 (p. 295). In Di Cesare 2010, she specifically examines how Gadamer interprets the Platonic concept of the 'dyad' in the *Philebus*, connecting it with notions of limit, the unlimited, and the infinite dialogue inherent in philosophical hermeneutics.

<sup>29</sup> See GW 1 (p. 280).

language, and language exists only in dialogue" (1995b, p. 36). The tacit agreement that constitutes "the willingness for conversation" [Gesprächsbereitschaft], "[...] is only the entry into this play [of language], not the senseless attempt to keep it within limits" (1995b, p. 53). Understanding through agreement neither exhausts the interlocutors nor the subject of their dialogue, nor does it dissolve difference into a rigid identity.

When one says that there is agreement about something, that does not mean that one identical in conviction with the other. 'One comesto-terms' ['Man kommt überein'], as our language beautifully expresses it. It is a higher form of syntheke, to invoke the genius of the Greek language (GW 2, p. 16).

As Gadamer elaborates in his seminal *Wahrheit und Methode*, dialogue constitutes "a transformation towards what is common, where one no longer remains what one was" (GW 1, p. 384). Thus, "conversation with the other, their objections or their approval, their understanding and also their misunderstandings, means a kind of expansion of our individuality and a testing of the possible commonality to which reason encourages us" (GW 2, p. 210).

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Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire obtuvo su doctorado del John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought en la University of Chicago en 2023. Actualmente es becario postdoctoral de investigación (filosofía) del Fonds de Recherche du Québec - Société et Culture (FRQSC) en la Boston University y la University of Oxford. Sus intereses de investigación incluyen la filosofía griega antigua así como la filosofía europea post-kantiana, especialmente la fenomenología y la hermenéutica. Está especialmente interesado en cuestiones y problemas sobre los cuales estas dos tradiciones pueden encontrarse en un diálogo productivo. En 2023, la Hans-Georg Gadamer-Gesellschaft otorgó a Pageau-St-Hilaire un Gadamer Stipendium por su investigación actual sobre Aristóteles y Gadamer. Sus publicaciones sobre filosofía antigua y varios pensadores en las tradiciones fenomenológicas y hermenéuticas han aparecido (o están por aparecer) en varias revistas incluyendo Apeiron, Polis, European Journal of Philosophy, Epoché, y Review of Metaphysics. El primer libro de Pageau-St-Hilaire, Heidegger and German Platonism: The Shadows of Marburg está por publicarse con Cambridge University Press. También es autor de un breve libro introductorio titulado Heidegger and his Platonic Critics, próximo a publicarse como parte de la Cambridge Element Series on the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

**Luiz Rohden** es Profesor Titular de Filosofía, Decano de la Escola de Humanidades, y Director del "Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia da Unisinos" en la Universidade do Vale do Rio Dos Sinos. También es investigador en el CNPq. Completó estudios postdoctorales en el Boston College, EE.UU., con William Richardson en

2006, y en Penn State University, EE.UU., con Dennis Schmidt en 2015. En 2023, se desempeñó como Investigador Visitante en el Department of Philosophy en Texas A&M University, por invitación del Prof. Theodore George. Su principal especialidad filosófica gira en torno a la tradición hermenéutica. Tiene experiencia en el campo de la Filosofía, con énfasis en Filosofía del Lenguaje, Teoría del Conocimiento, Ética y Hermenéutica, centrándose principalmente en los siguientes temas: fenomenología, lenguaje, hermenéutica filosófica y hermenéutica como ética. Sus libros más destacados son: Filosofar com Gadamer e Platão; hermenêutica filosófica a partir da Carta Sétima, ed.1. São Paulo: Editora Annablume, 2018, O poder da linguagem; a 'Arte Retórica' de Aristóteles, ed.2. São Leopoldo: Edipucrs, 2010, Interfaces da Hermenêutica: método, ética e literatura, ed. 1. Caxias do Sul: Editora UCS, 2008, y HERMENÊUTICA FILOSÓFICA –Entre a linguagem da experiência e a experiência da linguagem, ed.1. São Leopoldo: Editora Unisinos, 2005.

Roger W. H. Savage es Profesor en la University of California, Los Angeles, especializado en hermenéutica, estética y política. Sus libros incluyen Hermeneutics and Music Criticism, Music, Time, and Its Other: Aesthetic Reflections on Finitude, Temporality, and Alterity, y Paul Ricoeur's Philosophical Anthropology as Hermeneutics of Liberation: Freedom, Justice, and the Power of Imagination. También editó Paul Ricoeur in the Age of Hermeneutical Reason: Poetics, Praxis, and Critique y Paul Ricoeur and the Lived Body. El Prof. Savage es miembro fundador y expresidente de la Society for Ricoeur Studies.

Dieter Teichert estudió Filosofía, Lingüística y Literatura en la Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, la Université Sorbonne (París), y la Universität Konstanz, de la cual es Profesor de Filosofía. Sus intereses de investigación incluyen Hermenéutica Filosófica, Epistemología de las Ciencias Humanas, Teorías de la Identidad Personal. Monografías: Erfahrung, Erinnerung, Erkenntnis. Untersuchungen zum Wahrheitsbegriff der Hermeneutik Gadamers (Stuttgart 1991); Immanuel Kant 'Kritik der Urteilskraft'—Ein einführender

Kommentar (Paderborn 1992); Personen und Identitäten (Berlin-New York 1999); Verstehen und Wirkungsgeschichte (Bonn 2000); Einführung in die Philosophie des Geistes (Darmstadt 2006). Ha publicado también numerosos artículos, entre los más recientes: "Reflexion, Imagination, Performanz. Trost bei Cicero und Seneca," Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte 65 (2023), 7-28; "Über die Theorie und Praxis der Begriffsgeschichte bei Hans-Georg Gadamer" (próximamente).

Darren Walhof es Profesor de Ciencia Política en la Grand Valley State University (Michigan, EE.UU.) y Presidente del Political Science Department de dicha universidad. Es autor de *The Democratic Theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer* y co-editor con Derek Peterson de *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History.* Sus artículos y capítulos sobre hermenéutica, teoría democrática, y religión y política han aparecido en *Political Theory, History of Political Thought, Philosophy & Social Criticism, Contemporary Political Theory*, y *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, entre otras revistas. Imparte cursos de teoría política y derecho constitucional y ha sido galardonado con el University Outstanding Teacher Award de Grand Valley.



Este libro, que usó tipografía Perpetua tamaño tipo 11, se terminó de diagramar en Editorial Universitaria en el mes de abril de 2025 siendo rector de la Universidad Central del Ecuador el Dr. Patricio Espinosa del Pozo, Ph. D. y Director de la Editorial Universitaria el MSc. Edison Benavides.

# GA DA Hans-Georg MER

Los ensayos aquí reunidos demuestran cómo la hermenéutica filosófica de Gadamer continúa iluminando cuestiones fundamentales a través de diversas regiones en las que cada vez se pone en juego el preguntar—desde el lenguaje hasta la tradición, la historia, la ética, la política, la religión, la ciencia, la experiencia estética y el pensamiento antiguo. Fiel al espíritu gadameriano, cada una de las perspectivas que ofrece este libro expone una o varias respuestas provisionales a preguntas que permanecen perpetuamente abiertas, especialmente para aquellos que son capaces de leer por sí mismos y verdaderamente permiten que algo les sea dicho. En una era marcada por la pleonexia y la polarización, esta obra cumplirá mejor su propósito si los lectores de este volumen abordan cada contribución brindando el tipo de escucha atenta que el diálogo genuino exige, involucrándose con estos ensayos como si de movimientos de una exploración polifónica de vigorosas preguntas se tratara, preguntas a la vez ajenas y familiares, distantes y cercanas.

Facundo Bey









